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PSYCHO LOVE COMEDY

水城水城

illustration
生煮え

3

殺人希と期末死験

Mizuki Mizushiro × Namanie

PSYCHO LOVE COMEDY

ファミ通文庫

15th Anniversary

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サイコメ 3

殺人希と期末死験

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PSYCOME

3

殺人希と
期末死験

「会いたかった……
ずっとずっと会いたかったよ、
お兄ちゃん」

「ごめんな、綾花……
お前にそんな思いを
させちまって、
本当にごめん」

All Hope Is Gone?
コア・クライシス 間一

「ああっ、
また計算ミスしてる！
つめが甘いよ、
お兄ちゃん」

「焦らずゆっくり、
確実に解いていけばいい。
ケアレスミスこそ最大の敵だよ」

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Preparation - Introduction

"Go die in a ditch!"

Accompanied by a growl that did not match the mumbling pubescent voice, the metal pipe flashed. A horizontal sweep, tearing through the air, was about to smash the bridge of a nose that was wearing piercings today as usual.

"Hyahahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Just as everyone thought that was going to happen, the boy ducked and dodged the pipe in the next instant.

Violent wind swept past the tips of a bright red mohican hair.

" " "...!?" " "

The unexpected development was like a bomb had instantly exploded in the classroom. Even Kurumiya stared wide-eyed after swinging her metal pipe. Mohican's eyes were giving off blazing light.

Held in his hand was a giant chainsaw. As the deadly weapon played a tune in bass, he licked his lips.

"Gyahahahaha, it's my victory, Kurumiya-chuwaaaaaaaaaaaaaa~n!"

With a shrill roar, the chainsaw was swung. The rapidly turning sawteeth left marks of damage on the floor while threatening to saw Kurumiya into two up from her crotch.

"Gyaha!?"

But as one would expect, that did not turn into reality. Effortlessly dodging with a turn of her body, Kurumiya grabbed Mohican's face with her empty right hand.

"Gyaaaaaaaaah!?"

It was anyone's guess how great a force Kurumiya exerted but Mohican could do nothing but struggle tragically. The chainsaw suddenly tilted and fell from his hand.

"Uwahhhhhh!?"

On a nearby boy's desk--Kamiya Kyousuke's--the chainsaw began to cut into the desk's surface, making a ton of noise.

Almost killed, Kyousuke fell from his chair in surprise.

"Kyah!? Where do you think you're touching, pervert!"

"Ow!"

After falling on someone, he was viciously punched.

Focused on her iron grip, Kurumiya did not even glance at the commotion on Kyousuke's side.

"You've improved, Mohican, now that you're able to dodge my pipe. But you'd do best to remember this. It's still a bajillion years too soon for you to make me submit, asshole!"

Roused to a frenzy, she smacked her right hand against the blackboard.

"Gyahahhhhhhhhh!"

The back of Mohican's head was smashed into the blackboard, leaving a radial pattern of cracks on the board.

With a frown, Kurumiya took her hand off the unconscious problem child who currently had his eyes rolled up.

"Good grief... I clearly taught you many lessons during the open-jail school event but your memory hasn't improved at all... Hey, medical team! Clean up this filth here."

Accepting Kurumiya's orders, the standby team in white reclaimed Mohican, taking him away on a stretcher. The chainsaw's engine stalled just before sawing through Kyousuke's desk completely and was taken away together.

"...Hey, how much longer are you going to keep this going for?"

Currently, the student on at the neighboring desk on the left--a girl with rust-red hair and eyes--complained with displeasure, glaring at Kyousuke who was hugging her waist.

"Hurry and get your filthy hands off me, you massive molester!"

"Ow!"

Another fierce punch.

"...Very well. Let's continue morning homeroom."

Readjusting her mental state, Kurumiya began to pass out the prepared handouts.

Holding his hurting face, Kyousuke accepted the sheet of paper.

`Purgatorium School of Rehabilitation's First Term Finals Schedule`

That was what was written there.

Although Kyousuke had heard about exams here, this was his first time encountering them.

Sweeping her gaze across the noisy classroom, Kurumiya began to explain.

"There are three sets of exams in this school. These final examinations are scheduled at the end of the first, second and third school terms respectively. There are no midterms. Due to their broad coverage, do study well for them, okay? The exams take place over two days for a total of ten subjects. Examination times are the same length as lessons, sixty minutes."

A timetable was written on the paper with explanations all over.

First day: Modern Japanese, Social Studies, English, Home Economics, Art.

Second day: Mathematics, Science, Music, Physical and Health Education... as well as Ethics.

Apart from the breadth covered by exams and the Ethics subject, they felt like ordinary exams.

That being said, students at this school were not immune to exam anxiety either. The mood in the classroom clearly began to grow somber.

In such an atmosphere, Kurumiya added:

"Also, the threshold for passing is half of the average. If you're unfortunate enough to fail even after attending my lessons, the consequences... I need not elaborate, do I? Swine."

Threatening in a voice filled with violence, she crushed and rumpled the handout in her hand.

"Don't mistakenly think you're getting away simply with exam papers marked red all over. At supplementary lessons held during the vacation after the finals, other things of yours will be broken too. Go ahead and fail if you dare to join the supplementary lessons. Apart from lesson material, see if I don't fill your brain up entirely! Fear, despair, humiliation and shame, using torture and interrogation techniques from all over the word, I shall use your bodies as teaching materials, capish!?"

--Thud! A fist was lowered.

" " "....." " "

The classroom was silent Perhaps everyone present understood instantly.

These were no ordinary exams but death finals where one's life was on the line.

"...However." Looking down on the trembling students, Kurumiya continued.

"Final exams come with not only sticks but carrots too. Limited to only the summer holiday after the finals, students with outstanding grades are eligible for parole in the surface society! Although as usual there will be custodial observation, at least you'll have about a week of freedom outside of the school. Do things you want to do, visit places you want to visit, see people you want to see."

The carrot presented by Kurumiya instantly changed the atmosphere in the classroom.

Surprise, wavering, joy, excitement. But among these reactions, most obvious of all was...

"--Hey."

Kyousuke kicked his chair away and stood up.

Suddenly, this action gathered the attention of every student in the room.

However, Kyousuke remained unfazed.

In this mind were only the words he had been told just now.

'See people you want to see.' That was what Kurumiya had definitely said.

".....Is this for real?"

Looking at the teacher's grinning face, he sought confirmation.

"Of course." Kurumiya nodded.

"How could a teacher deceive students? During parole, you will be free. As long as you obey the custodial officer and obey requirements, you will be free to do anything you want."

"...Conditions?"

He asked again. What was meant by outstanding grades. The quota for eligibility for parole? These detailed conditions must be found out immediately.

Kurumiya played with the handout that had been crumpled into a ball.

"Top three students in the year group, in terms of total score summed from all ten subjects. As stated in the handout, this is the minimum condition for parole. On top of that, good daily conduct and attitudes is also needed for authorization of parole. The standards are not that strict, so just relax. Of course, if your conduct is as bad as Mohican's, you'll be denied unanimously..."

Throwing these words out, Kurumiya twisted her face.

Mohican, who could not even attend class properly, was the prime candidate for failing. Seeing as he was definitely going to be served with supplementary lessons, this was probably the cause of Kurumiya's displeasure.

Seeing Kurumiya shout "Shit, that fucking bastard! Die! Die and die, go die in a ditch!", tearing the piece of paper into shreds, Kyousuke could only sympathize with her.

"Hmph. Any other questions?"

"...No more. Thank you very much."

Kyousuke nodded and sat down, carefully reading the content on the handout.

For Kyousuke who was not the smart type, achieving top three in the year was not an easy condition to fulfill. The hurdle for parole was rather high.

--However.

(This is not a question of whether it's possible. Rather, I have no choice but to do it. Now is not the time to fear failing or supplementary lessons. No matter what, I must get into the top three--)

He must go outside. Even if only for a week, he had to return home and see *her*.

He wanted to meet the younger sister who was waiting for him, to see her and apologize, to reassure her.

As much as it could take a long time, he definitely must return.

Even so, he must endure.

--Hence.

In this abnormal educational institute, the Purgatorium School of Rehabilitation, where juvenile convicted murderers were gathered...

Sentenced here on false charges, Kyousuke currently committed his resolve.

On this Friday in the latter part of July, there were still ten days before the final exams.

For the first time in his life, he was going to study like mad as though his life depended on it...

"Oh, there's another monumental announcement."

"...Huh?"

Just as Kyousuke was preparing for the lesson to start, he looked at Kurumiya in curiosity.

Not merely important but monumental.

A foreboding alarm rang in his heart.

"Ahem." Kurumiya cleared her throat.

"We welcome a new member joining Year 1 Class A."

--A transfer student.

" " "......!?" " "

The entire classroom was in uproar due to Kurumiya's extremely shocking announcement.

To think someone would transfer to a school for murderers, what on earth was going on?

Besides, it was July, right at the time just before exams...

"Despite the awkward timing... The subject insisted strongly, 'hoping to enroll as early as possible', which is why a transfer was undertaken as a special case."

Saying that, Kurumiya took out a new pipe.

Using the bent tip, she made a thrust towards the students.

"After Golden Week earlier this year, this transfer student went to the middle school she was attending, barged into a classroom where lessons were in progress, then used a modified shotgun that was prepared beforehand--That was the plan. However, due to improper assembly, the ammunition failed to ignite and shoot out. After being subdued, she was simply apprehended. In other words, it was attempted murder. Even so, her intention to murder was the real thing. Were it not for improper use of firearms, perhaps her kill count might have matched Kamiya's twelve... Hence, even without killing anyone, this vicious fiend cannot be let go and has been institutionalized for rehabilitation."

Treating the pipe as a gun barrel, Kurumiya simulated a "bang".

Aiming unerringly straight at Kyousuke's forehead.

Even though he did not bleed, Kyousuke was breaking out in sweat.

(Barging into a classroom with a shotgun, that's way terrible. And this kind of person is coming to our class? I'm so scared I can't even concentrate on studying for exams...)

Although the new student had not killed anyone, superficially, he absolutely must not lower his guard.

Judging from behavior, he did not think that this transfer student could possibly be a respectable person. While Kyousuke was trembling, most of his classmates were getting excited.

"Heh? A shotgun huh? I'd like to try firing one too. Bang bang bang."

"H-Heeheehee... A rain of blood from a storm of buckshot... Bathed in a pool of blood... Heehee."

"Firing a gun in Japan, that would be truly dangerous... Fufu. If she turns out to be a beauty, I'd greatly welcome her."

"How vicious is this chick!? One of those youth gang members who target older men? Not a human hunter, I hope!"

These fellow murderers around Kyousuke began to clamor.

But a single "shut up" from Kurumiya silenced them.

"Well, this is only expected from what I just said. For specifics, just ask her directly. Are you very curious? You bunch of murderers, craving depraved bastards who slaughter classmates... Kukuku."

Laughing, Kurumiya looked at the classroom entrance ahead.

Everyone's gaze turned to follow as well.

"Okay, very well. Come in!"

Kurumiya called out, then...

After some clattering... The grille door opened.

"Excuse me."

Accompanied by an excited high-pitched voice, the transfer student finally appeared.

The instant the student's figure entered their eyes, all the classmates stared together wide-eyed.

--The transfer student was a young girl.

Petite and skinny in build, the limbs extending from her sleeves and skirt hem looked fragile enough to break on contact, slender to a pathological degree.

However, what everyone stared at intently was not her body but her *head*.

"Oooh~ This has such bad visibility."

After turning her head left and right to check out the classroom, the student walked inside.

What ought to be a human's head was occupied by a horse's head instead.

" " "------" " "

Faced with this unidentified horse-human, the class was bewildered.

Skin texture that was authentic enough to recreate veins, even, it shone with black luster. Its oppressive presence was fully backed by the half-open mouth and massive nostrils, as well as that outrageously rolled over eyeballs.

"Eeeeeek!? UMA! Unidentified life form! Monster!!!"

A girl, sitting behind Kyousuke's left, curled into a ball and screamed.

In fact, this horse's head was not the real thing, of course, but a costume. Even so, the detailed craftsmanship was still enough to send a timid girl into panic, producing great shock.

"The smell of rubber is so strong inside. Really wanna take this off soon. Difficult to breathe too~"

On the other hand, this voice...

The voice's high pitch was quite unnatural, possibly due to inhaling helium like during parties.

The horse-human slowly walked through the classroom, arriving before the lectern. The students stared at this terrifying transfer student.

"...Phew. Finally got here due to various reason. What a miracle no further complications happened."

"Hmph, good work. But you're not allowed to take it off yet. Do your self-introduction as you are now."

"Yes, got it!"

After speaking with Kurumiya at the lectern, the horse-human stood with straight posture.

The girl to the back and left of Kyousuke went "Eeek!? I-I-I-I-It's looking at me!!!!" Screaming shrilly and jumping up, hugging the girl in front of her.

Facing that horse-human, making no extreme reaction--

Kyousuke was staring at her.

".....Eh?"

Kyousuke suddenly felt a sense of dissonance.

Faced with the unidentified transfer student, he was feeling a surge of nostalgia.

"Nice to meet you, everyone. Good morning. I wanted to enroll here because there's someone I must see no matter what! To me, he is the most important person in the world. Even if means giving up my life, I must see him... To follow him, I picked up a gun! But failing to kill anyone, I was plunged into abject despair... However, getting into this school without problems makes me so happy."

"...Hey."

Perhaps the effects of helium was beginning to weaken, the high-pitched voice sounded like it had returned to normal all of a sudden. That was definitely a voice Kyousuke would never fail to recognize...

"Hey, hey, hey, hey."

Even Kyousuke's own voice was beginning to tremble pathetically.

Kyousuke shook his head to dispel the image of *that person* from his mind.

"...No way."

How could she possibly have come here.

No matter how similar the voice, how similar the physique, how similar the feeling--This could not possibly happen. Nevertheless...

"Yes, so happy... Ve~ry happy! Happy, happy, happy, happy happy happy happy happy happy happy, happy enough to go mad! Aha... Aha aha, ahahahahahahahahahaha! Ever since the sudden nightmare descended, torn apart every day and night, the wish repeated nonstop has finally come true! *Kusu*."

With the fake voice finally cast away, Kyousuke's hopes were immediately dashed.

The foreboding feeling surfacing in Kyousuke's heart had already turned into certainty.

Unable to handle the emotions flooding his brain, his mental circuits were frozen.

The world seemed to be bathed in white light.

Amidst Kyousuke's despair, the transfer student placed her hands at her neck.

--Wait.

Kyousuke wanted to cry out, but could not speak.

"Ahhh, finally..."

His thoughts failed to transmit, he was unable to stop the transfer student.

Feeling that it was in the way, she took off the horse's head that she was wearing on her head.

"We finally meet again, Onii-chan!"

The transfer student whose true face was now revealed--Kamiya Ayaka--smiled radiantly like a blooming flower.

Question 1 - Core Crisis / "All Hope Is Gone?"

Kamiya Kyousuke

Q: What is your target ranking for the final exams?

A: My dream is enter top three in the year group! I realize my goal or die trying.

Q: Strongest and weakest subjects?

A: Best subject is PE, no good at all classroom subjects. But exams only cover classroom subjects...

Q: What will you do if you were granted parole?

A: Obviously, I'll go see Ayaka... What the heck? My little sister came here on her own!!!!!?

Q: Please muster your vigor and make your exam declaration!

A: Whatever, I don't care about exams anymore...

All Hope Is Gone?
コア・クライシス 問一

Q.期末テストの目標順位は?

夢はでっかく学年三位以内だ!
死ぬ気で取りにいかせてもらうぜ。

Q.得意な教科と苦手な教科は?

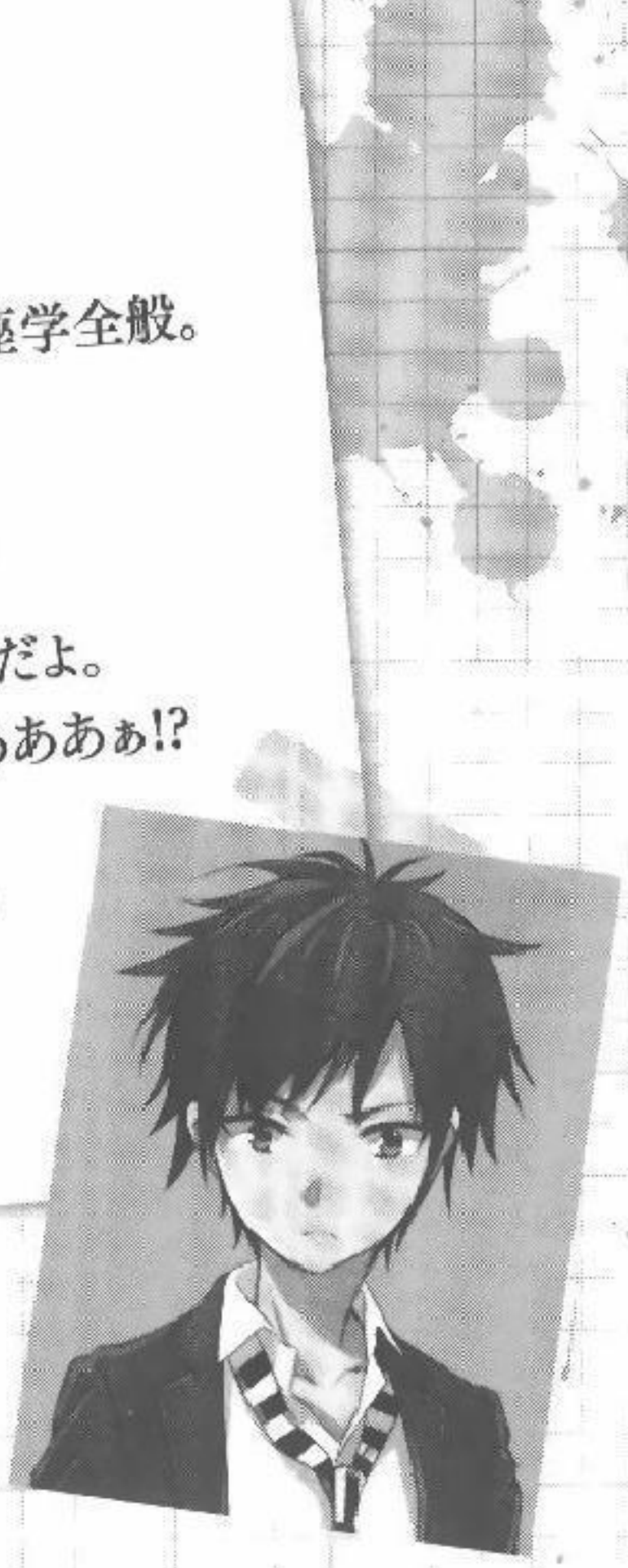
得意な教科は体育で、苦手な教科は座学全般。
テストはALL座学だけどな……。

Q.仮釈放されたら何をしたいですか?

決まってんだろ。綾花に会いに行くんだよ。
……って、妹から来たあああああああああぁ!?

Q.テストに対する意気込みをどうぞ!

もういいよ、
テストとかマジどうでもいいよ……。



"--So! Ayaka is Kamiya Kyousuke's little sister, Kamiya Ayaka. Thirteen years old. Two things different from Onii-chan. Although the kill count is zero, it was the gun's fault, not Ayaka's fault, so please don't get the wrong idea. By the way, the horse and the helium were prepared by Kurumiya-sensei, you know? So just to be clear, they're not Ayaka's hobbies."

Ayaka did her self-introduction with incomparable cheerfulness.

"...No way, right?"

Kyousuke felt like a nightmare was born.

Ayaka's appearance in this classroom was impossible for him to accept as reality.

--He did not want to accept it.

Ayaka smiled at the stunned Kyousuke.

"This is no lie."

Like a knife, reality stabbed him.

"Absolutely no mistake, Ayaka is the real Ayaka, you know? Maybe you can't believe it, Onii-chan, but Ayaka mustered courage to see you! Ehehe, you must be very happy, right? Ayaka is so happy! Able to see Onii-chan again, so happy! But, ooh... You look a lot more haggard than before? Are you okay? Was it that lonely not seeing Ayaka?"

Faced with the silent Kyousuke, Ayaka said:

"...Huh? Hey hey Onii-chan. Why aren't you talking?"

"------"

"Hey! Why are you ignoring Ayaka!? This reunion wasn't easy--"

"Okay okay. Calm down, Kamiya the younger. These things need patience. The shock from surprised joy is too great, so Kamiya's brain is out for the count. You need to be considerate of that."

"...Yeah." The hysterical Ayaka calmed down after hearing Kurumiya's advice.

"Oh right! Onii-chan can't speak because you're overjoyed to reunite with Ayaka, right? Fufu. What an unreliable big brother... But that's what Ayaka loves the most about Onii-chan!"

Clapping her hands together lightly, she smiled radiantly.

Ayaka's tone of voice was very cheerful, acting exactly the same way as Kyousuke always knew her.

--Weird.

If this were a normal classroom, Kyousuke could understand.

But this was a classroom at the Purgatorium School of Rehabilitation, an extremely dangerous place where the entire class consisted of convicted murderers. In spite of that, Ayaka was calm and totally unfazed. Unable to

understand what was going through Ayaka's mind, Kyousuke could only feel *fear* spreading in his heart.

To think his flesh-and-blood sister had harbored such thoughts, Kyousuke was quite stunned by this face.

Kinnnnnnnng, konnnnnnnnnng. Kannnnnnnng, konnnnnnnnnng...

While Kyousuke was plunged into confusion and fear, the bell's hoarse ringing was heard throughout the classroom.

"Got a boyfriend?" "Nope." "What's your type?" "Onii-chan." "What's your favorite food?" "Onii-cha--Sweet things." "Any hobbies?" "Cooking for Onii-chan." "What's your best dish?" "Onii-chan's favorite. Meat stew, assorted stir-fry, cabbage rolls, etc." "Secret recipe?" "Love (profound)" ...etc.

Kurumiya stopped the questioning segment.

"...Okay, time's up! That's it for the self-introduction."

Confirming the time on her watch, she rubbed off the words "Kamiya Ayaka" written on the blackboard.

"Time is running short, so let's start the lesson. Next next week will be the final exams, you know? Hurry and take your seat, Kamiya the younger."

"Yes, got it!"

Answering energetically, Ayaka walked down from the lectern.

With light and lively steps, she made her way to the target, the neighboring seat on Kyousuke's right. The empty seat whose owner was absent due to having been disciplined.

Ayaka pushed the desk against Kyousuke's desk as though it were the most natural thing in the world.

"Ehehe. Onii-chan's neighbor, get."

She sat down openly. A mischievous smile.

"Yes." Kurumiya nodded with satisfaction.

"Kamiya the younger, you will sit there from now on. Use the desk and chair as you please. However, putting desks together is only allowed for today, got that? Once your textbooks arrive, sit back at the original spot."

"Yes~~!"

"Answers should be brief and forceful!"

"Yes, very sorry!"

"Good."

"...Teehee. Ayaka suddenly got scolded."

Ayaka stuck out her tongue.

On her face was the unchanging smile all along. Kyousuke could tell that Ayaka did not feel any threat from the classmates who have murdered and the sadistic and violent teacher.

In this unusual environment, sitting next to Kyousuke to attend class, Ayaka looked like she could not be happier.

× × ×

The bell rang to announce the end of the first period.

Greatly interested in Ayaka, the classmates gathered all around.

"...Come this way."

"Kyah!?"

Kyousuke pulled Ayaka's hand, passing in front of Kurumiya while she was packing up her teaching materials. Despite being under everyone's gaze, he walked over to the corridor without even looking to the side.

"Onii-chan, where are you taking--Ouch! You're hurting Ayaka's hand!"

Ayaka whimpered but Kyousuke ignored her.

"Oh my oh my, coming up with exam questions is such a pain. I guess I should let my 'friend' help out--"

"Excuse me."

"Woah!?"

Kyousuke almost collided with a middle-aged man in a crumpled suit who had just exited the Year 1 Class B classroom next door, then quickly made his way to the roof of the old school building.

After getting there, Kyousuke stopped and faced Ayaka.

Ayaka was going "Onii-chan, jeez, you're too violent... It hurts!" while rubbing and staring at her arm that Kyousuke had grabbed.

Cocking her head, Ayaka blinked.

"Your face is a bit stiff. What's the matter? Are you tired?"

"------"

"Huh?" Ayaka tilted her head the other direction.

"...Onii-chan? Why won't you speak? You've been like this since a while ago, why? Ayaka has been talking to you in class, Onii-chan, but you won't answer Ayaka at all! Ayaka doesn't get it!"

"...Yeah."

"Eh? What did you just say, Onii-chan? Speak up a bit, Ayaka can't hear--"

"You're the one I don't get, okay!?"

"...!?"

When Kyousuke roared at her, Ayaka cowered away and held her hands over her ears, protesting "t-too loud..."

Kyousuke took a step towards the totally non-serious Ayaka.

All the emotions Kyousuke had kept bottled inside him, raging, swirling emotions, all the words he had kept suppressed, were instantly pour out, vented.

"Attending this kind of school... Barging into a classroom with a shotgun? Shooting classmates? What are you doing...? What the fuck are you trying to do!? How... How could you even think of killing people!? And in spite of it all, why can you still smile and laugh--"

"Uwahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Making a sound to interrupt Kyousuke's shouting, Ayaka hugged him tightly.

"Because, because... Ayaka is so lonely! So very very very very lonely!!! Starting the day you were suddenly gone, Ayaka was left all alone, all lonesome by herself... Lonely enough to die!!! Lonely, grieving, sad, painful, dunno what to do at all, Ayaka felt so troubled every day, every day, every day, every every every every every every every every daaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay! Troubling how to get Onii-chan back, troubling how to meet Onii-chan again, troubling what to do... what to do for Ayaka to go to the same place as Onii-chan! Ayaka agonized and agonized and agonized and agonized and agonized and agonized and agonized and agonized, thinking and thinking and thinking and thinking and thinking and thinking, searching and searching and searching and searching and searching and searching and searching and searching, then Ayaka finally figured it out! Ayaka wondered if Ayaka did the same thing as Onii-chan, would Ayaka end up in the same place as Onii-chan...? If Ayaka killed people too, then Ayaka would be brought to the same place as Onii-chan!!! Because Ayaka is so lonely...

So lonely that Ayaka could die!!! Ayaka must see Onii-chan no matter what... Sob sob sob sob sob."

Pushing her face against Kyousuke's chest and rubbing, she cried out.

Hugging him, her arms applied unbelievable power, making it difficult for Kyousuke to breathe.

"When the gun failed to fire, Ayaka felt as though the world had ended... Ayaka was thinking, if Ayaka can't even kill one person, then Ayaka can't go to where Onii-chan went, having killed twelve. Held down by many people, Ayaka still desperately tried to kill them, but Ayaka failed... Ayaka cried all this time. Onii-chan's not coming back, Ayaka can't see Onii-chan again, can't go to where Onii-chan is... Ayaka has been crying all along, all along, all along, all along, all along forever. So... So, when Ayaka saw Onii-chan in this classroom, Ayaka was so happy. So very very happy! No matter how scary a place this is, no matter how scary the people, no matter how much pain and suffering every day, Ayaka is fine with it. That is how happy Ayaka is--"

"Ayaka..."

"That's why Ayaka is very very happy. Onii-chan is here, right by Ayaka's side, within arm's reach... Together. That's enough for Ayaka to be happy. Oh, Ayaka missed you so much... Missing you all this time, Onii-chan."

Ayaka closed her eyes and huddled her body.

She had lost a lot of weight. Her arms and legs, very slender to begin with, were now as skinny as sticks, looking as though the slightest pressure would break them.

What had cause Ayaka to change so much?

--Naturally, apart from Kyousuke, there could be no other reason.

The sense of losing Kyousuke had tormented, cornered and corroded Ayaka...

By the time she realized, she had already crossed the threshold of murder.

Clearly he was the reason but he had insensitively roared at Ayaka who was hurt all over. This behavior of his made Kyousuke feel so angry at himself that he wanted to punch himself flying.

"...Sorry."

Kyousuke apologized and hugged Ayaka.

Careful not to break her delicate body, he exerted force gently.

"Onii-chan?" Ayaka murmured in surprise.

"Sorry, Ayaka... I'm sorry for making you feel this way, really sorry. I know that I can't be forgiven even if I apologize. Ever since the day I was suddenly arrested, always... I've wanted to see you, to apologize to you. I never thought you'd come over yourself to see me, Ayaka, it startled me... Now I'm finally calm. The feelings of wanting to see each other, I share them too. I really missed you too. Always, I've longed to see you again, Ayaka."

"Onii-chan..."

Kyousuke's pouring of his true feelings made Ayaka's voice go moist.

Confirming that his irreplaceable family was by his side, feeling the warmth held against his bosom, Kyousuke could feel joy spreading in his heart.

"I'm so glad you didn't actually kill anyone..."

If bullets had actually shot out and Ayaka killed someone, Kyousuke really had no idea how he would feel. Luckily, the shotgun had malfunctioned during the act of attempted murder.

Ayaka had neither killed anyone nor harmed anyone.

Kyousuke's sanity was hanging by a thread. Even so, the fact that Ayaka had committed the crime of *attempted murder* was still plenty shocking to Kyousuke.

"Hey Ayaka, don't do that kind of stuff ever again, okay?"

Releasing Ayaka, he asked in a nervous voice.

"Okay!" Ayaka nodded vigorous and replied.

"Ayaka won't do it again. Of course not! Actually, Ayaka doesn't wanna do that kind of thing... If it weren't for meeting Onii-chan, Ayaka doesn't want to kill people. Ayaka is not a murderer. Killing people is scary, Ayaka hates it, you know?"

"...I see."

Kyousuke felt relieved and relaxed his tense shoulders.

--In that case, whatever.

Currently, what Kyousuke needed to do was not scold Ayaka.

Instead, he had to heal his sister's poor tormented heart.

Reminding himself that, Kyousuke faced Ayaka.

"...You're right. Like hell anyone's gonna kill for fun."

"*Kusu*. Of course! Ayaka doesn't want to get near such scary people--Oh no!? But Onii-chan doesn't count, okay? Onii-chan is not scary at all! Rather, Ayaka is happy to offer her life to Onii-chan."

Ayaka tightened her fist and added.

Kyousuke's expression collapsed in the face of this sister who thought so much of her brother.

"Oh thank you. I was thinking you'd be scared of me for killing twelve people, but looks like I worried for nothing. That's my little sister! Then I'll gratefully take your life... YEAH RIGHT!!!! I haven't killed anyone, okay!"

Kyousuke instinctively went with the flow of Ayaka's words but frantically insisted on his innocence.

Murdering twelve people was actually a false charge and involved a lot of troublesome matters, including keeping his murderer facade inside of school... Kyousuke briefly explained his current situation.

However, he kept the school's "true purpose" from her.

Ayaka was surely going to be confused if he revealed everything all at once.

After listening to Kyousuke, Ayaka began to speak. "In other words..."

"Ayaka and Onii-chan are the only two people here who haven't killed a single person? Ayaka can't believe she's such a great match for Onii-chan, so glad! Ehehe."

Ayaka suddenly smiled and hugged him again.

"Woah!?" Kyousuke suddenly leaned back.

"You... That's the first comment you make? I guess I'm glad too."

Of Kyousuke's acquaintances, there was also his friend, the girl with rust-red hair and rust-red eyes, who had not killed anyone. In other words, they were a trio rather than a pair, but...

(I shouldn't be the one revealing her secret.)

Making this decision, Kyousuke remained silent on the issue.

While Ayaka was burying her face in Kyousuke's chest, her shoulders suddenly shook.

".....There's the smell of unfamiliar women."

She murmured softly and sniffed to confirm.

Due to her muffled voice, Kyousuke did not quite catch what she said.

"What smell? I'm sorry if there's a sweaty stench... Every morning, we need to do something called penal labor. After being forced to do four hours of physical labor, only changing my shirt without a chance for a shower, I guess it's really, umm... Smelly, right?"

"Oh no! That was just Ayaka talking to herself just now, don't mind it, okay? Ayaka doesn't mind. Yes, doesn't mind... doesn't mind..."

"...Ayaka?"

As much as Ayaka continued to murmur something to herself, since she said she did not mind, Kyousuke decided not to dwell on it.

Compared to that kind of thing, right now there were more important things to confirm first.

"Say, how did you get that shotgun--"

Before Kyousuke could finish asking, the bell rang to signal the end of the break.

Ayaka withdrew from Kyousuke's chest and looked up at him.

"Hey Onii-chan, this place is more strict than normal schools, right...? What happens when you're late to class?"

"..."

Kyousuke instantly went pale in the face.

What happens when you're late to class...

Of course, the answer was--

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"...Okay, that's it for today. Go and work your asses off to study and prepare for the finals, okay? Break time now."

Kurumiya closed her textbook, packed her things and left the classroom.

On the blackboard, there were only two spots that were not densely packed with written words.

--A radial network of cracks and the brand-new bloodstain next to it. After staring at the residues of Kurumiya's disciplining, Ayaka shook all over.

"S-So cool..."

--Not out of fear but emotional resonance.

"Kurumiya-sensei is so cool! So strong yet gentle."

"Oh... Really? Hahaha..."

Kyousuke smiled back at Ayaka, completely puzzled inside.

When the break between periods ended, Kyousuke and Ayaka were simply forgiven by Kurumiya despite arriving after second period had started.

'You've got lots of stuff to say, that can't be helped.' Kyousuke could not believe that such words could come from Kurumiya who always pummeled students for being a second late.

Also, just before the end of the period, returning fresh from the infirmary...

'Hyaha! I've revived, gyahaha... What the fuck, huh!? Little shit over there, who da fuck are you!? How dare you steal my spot! Imma gonna kill--'

'Your spot's in the other world, so just go and die, MOTHER FUCKEEEEEEEEEEER!!!'

'Ogyahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!'

Kurumiya had vanquished Mohican with her metal pipe, protecting Ayaka. Hence, it was not impossible to understand why Ayaka's eyes were glimmering brightly with admiration.

"It feels like Ayaka can feel safe in class with her as the homeroom teacher."

"Uh, really? I guess she just happened to be in a good mood today."

".....Kyousuke."

At this moment, a classmate spoke to Kyousuke.

It was the girl with rust-red hair, sitting on his left.

With great curiosity, she was sweeping her gaze back and forth between Kyousuke and the girl sitting on his right.

"Hey, I've got many questions to ask you... Is this a good time?"

She asked politely.

"------"

Ayaka's smile vanished and she glared intently at the girl.

However, the girl was facing Kyousuke and failed to notice the change coming over Ayaka.

"Yeah... Sure, I haven't made introductions yet. This is my little sister--"

"Kamiya Ayaka. Nice to meet you!"

Ayaka stood up and introduced herself.

She went out of her way to go around the desk and walk over to the girl.

"Are you an acquaintance of my brother's?"

She asked with a smile.

The girl turned her half-closed eyes and looked at Ayaka politely.

"...That's right. I'm Akabane Eiri. Because our seats are very close, we get along quite well together, basically. Well, we're also in the same year."

"Eh? I see! Akabane Eiri-san, hmm~..."

Having heard the girl--Eiri--Ayaka looked at her as though appraising her.

Sniffing a few times, she whispered "...She's the one" to herself.

Eiri seemed to interpret Ayaka's attitude as wariness. Straightening her sitting posture of crossed legs, Eiri relaxed her imposing presence.

"...There's no need to be so on guard. I've no intention of hurting you. Of course, the same goes for your brother."

"--You're saying you won't make a move?"

"Yeah. So can you not look so bothered?"

"That's right, Ayaka. Despite how she looks, Eiri is actually very pure and gentle."

Eiri went "Huh!?" and blushed.

"What do you mean by despite how I look!? What pure and gentle, rubbish!"

"Impure means a slut, right?"

"Well..."

Eiri was rendered speechless by Ayaka's accusation.

Ayaka stuck her tongue mischievously.

"Just kidding, okay? Ayaka doesn't judge people by appearance."

"...Tsk."

"No clicking your tongue at my sister!"

"...Why am I the one getting yelled at. Just go die already."

"No telling Onii-chan to 'go die'!"

"Like I said, why am I getting yelled at..."

"Excuse me!"

As Eiri began to sulk, a girl emerged from behind her.

Chestnut-brown short hair, flaxen-colored eyes, the girl was just as petite as Ayaka in stature. She bowed properly and nervously introduced herself.

"N-Nice to meet you! Ahm... I'm Igarashi Maina, fourteen years old! Like Eiri-chan, we've given Kyousuke-kun a lot of care all the time, umm... no... We've received a lot of care from Kyousuke-kun! Ah, bit my tongue twice, auau, umm..."

"...How cunning."

"Eh!?"

"Nothing. It's not like Ayaka finds you cunning, okay?"

"Awawa. I'm glad you don't think that... What a relief!"

"Yes, Ayaka is relieved too! Because you're very dense!"

Kyousuke could feel Ayaka being deliberately offensive in her words, but dismissed the thought, seeing they were smiling with such friendliness. As for Eiri's scowling... Oh well, she's always like that anyway...

"Hey Onii-chan. Are all these people your close friends?"

"Yeah, they're my best friends in the class."

"Hmm~..."

Looking at Eiri and Maina, Ayaka then turned away from Kyousuke.

"Are you trying to pick a fight, Onii-chan?"

Kyousuke tilted his head in shock.

"......Come again?"

"...Huh?"

"Ehhh?"

"Because..." Seeing Kyousuke and his friends in shock, Ayaka swept her gaze around the entire classroom.

"These girls are top-quality beauties in the class. To think you're monopolizing these two beauties, Onii-chan, aren't you picking a fight with all the boys in the class? Plus Ayaka, that makes things even worse, right? Won't someone get jealous and kill you, Onii-chan?"

"....."

Having been through a number of near-death experiences already, Kyousuke could not even squeak in response.

On the other hand, in their surroundings--

"Well said! Don't complain even if you get slaughtered."

"Why is only the bitch ass punk getting heaven around him!? Get da fuck to hell!"

"H-Heehee... Stuff the male into a sack and stab madly, then penetrate the girls madly... Heeheehee."

"Huh? Like totally, not making sense. No dice. Like, what's so good? Like, I'm the only winner here, right?"

Various comments. Having heard Ayaka, the classmates all began to clamor.

Everyone was interested in Ayaka, but because Kyousuke and his circle was around her, they could not come up to talk to her.

Due to respective reasons related to Kyousuke, Eiri and Maina, the classmates almost always stayed away and did not talk to them. They were quite ostracized.

Probably reading the mood and figuring out Kyousuke's trio's status in the class, Ayaka quietly whispered in his ear.

"...Onii-chan needs to pretend to be the Mass Murderer of Twelve here, right? You didn't tell them how you haven't actually killed anyone, right?"

"...Yeah."

Kyousuke nodded at the whispered question.

Kyousuke and his friends shared many secrets that the other students did not know.

The true purpose of the Purgatorium School of Rehabilitation was not in reforming convicted murderers but to train them into professional killers; after graduating, they were going to be sent to the underbelly of society instead of the ordinary world...

First-years were not supposed to know these things. This was one of the reasons why Kyousuke and his circle did not want to actively get involved with the other students.

Then most importantly--This was an abnormal school gathering abnormal students.

Apart from these friends whom he could bare his heart to, it would be better to treat these people as "dead people" rather than classmates.

"Hmph... So you trust them so much?"

Ayaka examined Eiri and Maina.

"Yeah. They're very reliable and trustworthy. Since there are many places I can't go to, like the female changing rooms or the girls' dorms, if anything happens, I'm counting on you two, 'kay?"

"Eh? Can't you just undergo castration and turn into Onee-chan...?"

"Rejected. What the heck."

Kyousuke was surprised by Ayaka's totally serious look. He then turned his gaze to Eiri and Maina.

"I'm counting on you two. Please help my sister."

Kyousuke clapped his hands together to ask for a favor. Eiri went hmph.

"...That goes without saying, Captain Obvious."

"Since Ayaka-chan is here, let's all be friends! If you run into any trouble or anything you don't understand, feel free to fine us for advice! B-Bit my tongue again..."

Seeing Maina getting depressed from her verbal blunder at the end, Kyousuke smiled wryly.

"There there." Kyousuke stroked Maina's head while feeling gratitude for dependable friends from the bottom of his heart.

"Thank you, both of you. Ayaka too, you..."

"------"

"...Ayaka?"

Ayaka was gazing at a certain spot as though glaring at someone who had murdered her family.

That spot was Kyousuke's hand that was stroking Maina.

"Eh? Oh, sorry. Did you say something, Onii-chan?"

But in the next instant, she resumed a calm face.

Ayaka tilted her head. Eiri and Maina also made surprised looks.

...That was probably my imagination just now.

"No, nothing much... Basically, Ayaka, you should get along with my two friends! Even though I think that you'll be fine even if I don't make a formal request."

"Yeah. Ayaka will handle things appropriately."

Ayaka smiled and turned to Eiri and Maina again.

Her twin tails jumping and swaying, Ayaka took a bow.

"Onii-chan's friends, please take care of me. Ayaka has a whole mountain of questions for you, so let's talk later? *Kusu*."

"Questions? About what?"

"A little related to Onii-chan, yet not. Then let's just say it's not."

"Related yet not, so is it actually related or not...?"

A topic barred from boys? Kyousuke was lost.

As long as they got along, they could chat about any topic for all he cared.

"...Yes, let's get along."

"Let's get along!"

After getting the three girls through pleasantries, just as Kyousuke breathed a sigh of relief...

"Oh, over there! That girl must be the rumored transfer student? Foosh."

A cheerful soprano voice was heard.

The distinctive ventilator sound took Kyousuke aback.

...Oh crap. I totally forgot about her.

There was one more person he needed to introduce to Ayaka.

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"Oh, isn't this so lovey-dovey already!? So unfair! Let me join in too!"

Expressing her jealousy, the voice's owner approached in a beeline.

By the time Kyousuke noticed, a frivolous crowd had appeared in the corridor. Students from the neighboring class were probably coming to catch a glimpse of the transfer student as well.

Under curious gazes, the voice's owner passed openly through the classroom.

"Hi, everyone! I am Hikawa Renko-chan, lively today as always!"

Arriving before Kyousuke's group, she spun around on the spot.

Pointing at her face with her index finger, she imitated a mysterious "tada!" sound effect.

Ayaka's jaw dropped while she gazed at the face of the girl--Renko.

"Oh my oh my, you seem to be entranced by my beauty? How terrifying, my beauty that's capable of captivating even the same gender! Sorry, dear little transfer student... I'm too pretty! Foosh."

Renko delivered her speech totally unabashed while her face was covered by a pitch-black gas mask.

Dark, plastic eyepieces and a cylindrical filter canister. Due to her face being covered up completely by the insectoid-looking mask, her beauty was not public knowledge.

Furthermore, she was wearing headphones, which meant that her appearance could only be summed up as "bizarre."

Kyousuke and the others were used to the sight and had no problems with it, but it was more than a little shocking for Ayaka to encounter her for the first time.

"....."

"Oya?" Seeing Ayaka making no response for quite a while, Renko cocked her head.

"What's the matter, little transfer student? Did you really fall in love with me--"

"Please stop trying to make conversation."

"Shuko!?"

Renko froze, greatly taken aback.

"Your appearance is suspicious enough already but even your behavior is nonsensical. Calling yourself 'beautiful' when clearly your face is covered up by a weird mask... Don't wanna get involved with a weirdo like you."

Rejected mercilessly, Renko frantically screamed:

"Uwahhhhhhhh!? Do over, that one didn't count, let me do over again! It was just a gag! Not to be taken seriously! No, don't look at me with that kind of gaze..."

"...Huh? This is a gag?"

Ayaka pointed at Renko's gas mask.

"Yes. That's why if you don't make a witty quip accurately, you'll end up treating me as crazy person. Shuko... Do you understand?"

"Ah yes. It's understood that you're a very nonsensical person."

"I-I see... It's clear to me that you didn't understand anything at all."

Renko slumped her shoulders in dejection.

"...Sheesh." Kyousuke scratched the back of his head and tried to make peace between the two girls.

"Sigh... Although this girl seems kind of cuckoo in appearance, she's actually not that bad inside, you know? Like Eiri and Maina, she's one of my friends. A very ordinary and nice person, so let's all get along, okay?"

"......Muu."

Ayaka pouted at Kyousuke's request.

"...Another woman." She grumbled quietly.

"If you say so, Onii-chan, so be it... But shouldn't you be a bit more selective in friends? A slut who likes to use a gas mask for a gag, no matter what, that's way too--"

"W-W-W-W-W-WHAT!?"

Renko suddenly exclaimed wildly.

Ayaka was so frightened, she curled up.

Renko instantly closed in and grabbed Ayaka's shoulders.

"Onii-chan!? No way, you're... Kyousuke's little sister!?"

Renko asked in an excited voice. Since she had not heard Ayaka's self-introduction, she finally seemed to notice that Ayaka was Kyousuke's sister.

"Y-Yes." Ayaka turned her face away from the gas mask and answered.

Getting more and more excited, Renko stared intently at Ayaka's face.

"Now that you mention it and I look again, I do see the resemblance. Your eyes look almost identical! I can also see the shape of Kyousuke's face in many spot. Yes, what a cute little sister, foosh."

"Um... Argh, this is unbearable, please let go! Don't push your gas mask so close!"

Ayaka struggled out of Renko's grasp and hid behind Kyousuke's back.

"What are you doing so suddenly!? Ayaka is my little sister, so what--"

"".....Ayaka?"

Instantly, Renko spoke in a terrifying bass voice.

Her cheerful voice was instantly mixed with dark emotions.

" "......!?" "

This dramatic change made Ayaka back away.

Kyousuke's heart almost jumped out of his chest.

--Ayaka.

For Renko, this was not a name that she could ignore after hearing it. Completely ignoring her limiter's effects, murderous intent exploded from Renko.

"You said 'Ayaka' just now, right? 'Ayaka'... That's what you said, yes?"

Like a beast about to capture its prey, she lowered her stance.

Reflecting light off the fluorescent tubes, the glare in the eyepieces flickered.

"...Renko?" "Renko-chan?" "GMK...?"

The sudden change in Renko's aura made everyone feel lost at once. It was Kyousuke's first time to see Renko show this kind of attitude with her mask on.

Sensing something abnormal, Eiri stood up and placed her hand on Renko's shoulder.

"Hey, what's with you suddenly?"

"That's Ayaka."

"...Huh? What about that girl's name--"

"Like I said, that's Ayaka!!!"

Renko shook Eiri's hand off and cried out.

Like throwing a temper tantrum.

"Don't you know, Eiri!? It's Ayaka, AYAKA! The most important girl in the world to Kyousuke! Back when I confessed, Kyousuke went... 'Sorry, Renko. Ayaka is the one I love. That's why I can't respond to your feelings.' That's how he rejected me! I lost to Ayaka... I lost to his sister!!! Uwahhhhhhhhhh!!!"

Renko pretended to stomp her feet and began to cry and sob.

" " "......!?" " "

Everyone was watching Kyousuke with eyes of disbelief.

Ayaka's face went as red as a ripe apple.

"Most important girl in the world...? The one he loves, Ayaka...? Confession... Rejected? Eh? Ehhhhhhhhhh!? W-W-W-W-W-What's going on, Onii-chan!?"

"Eh!? No, umm--"

Confronted with the little sister who was sticking to him, Kyousuke felt super awkward.

He never expected his love for his sister to be exposed in this manner...

Even Eiri and Maina were commenting nonstop about the embarrassed Kyousuke.

"Kyousuke, you... rejected her confession because you love your sister? I-Incomprehensible..."

"Ayaka-chan is your real sister, you know!? Not allowed! This kind of thing is absolutely not allowed!"

"Uwahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh! Idiot, idiot, Kyousuke is such an idiot! I can't believe you chose your sister over me, you siscon! Siscon, siscon, siscon!!!"

"Dahhhhhhhhhh, shut the fuck up! Can you all be quiet!!!!"

Evading Eiri's cold gaze, covering his ears to avoid listening to Maina's objections, guarding against Renko's hammering fists, Kyousuke roared.

The classroom and corridor were both filled with comments: "Siscon..." "A siscon huh..." "Incurable." "I can't believe he rejected GMK!?" "SA.TSU.JIN! SA.TSU.JIN!" "I understand how you feel... A real sister, how nice." "--No way, step-sisters are the best!" "I've called the police."

The students were gossiping nonstop.

Kyousuke had been thinking that things had settled recently but ended up becoming the center of attention again.

"Onii-chan!" While Kyousuke was feeling utterly drained, Ayaka pounced on him, hugging his arm tightly.

"Hey hey hey hey, You love Ayaka, right? Onii-chan, you love Ayaka more than anyone else in the world, right!?"

" " "------" " "

All the noisy students quieted down at once.

They were all listening intently for Kyousuke's answer.

"Eh? Umm... Well..."

Ayaka looked up at Kyousuke with pleading eyes filled with anticipation.

--I have to respond to her. Kyousuke thought.

In his heart, Ayaka was irreplaceable.

These feelings were definitely genuine.

The only obstacle in his way was shyness.

Nothing required serious consideration.

"...Onii-chan?"

"Of course."

"Eh?"

"I love Ayaka! I love Ayaka more than anyone else in the world! That's right, I'M A SISCON AND I ADMIT IT!!!!!!!!!!"

Projecting his voice from the bottom of his diaphragm, Kyousuke announced his love for his sister.

Seeing as this was able to cheer up Ayaka a bit, he took the plunge.

" " "------" " "

Silence descended suddenly, without the slightest ripple.

Kyousuke timidly opened his eyes which he had shut while shouting loudly. In the next instant...

" " "Wowwwwwwwwwwwwwwww!" " "

He was drowned in deafening cheers.

The crowd had offered generous applause in response to Kyousuke's shameless declaration. Among the clamoring crowd, Eiri went "...Huh?" in shock while Maina wavered "awawa."

"Onii-chan!" Ayaka cried out in a voice rivaling the crowd's noise level.

"Ayaka loves Onii-chan too! Ayaka's love for Onii-chan surpasses that of anyone else in the world! Ayaka loves you the most, Onii-chan... Ehehe. Ayaka is a brocon, so our feelings are mutual!"

"R-Really!? Mutual huh... Hahaha."

"...Mutual?"

Ayaka hugged him forcefully, making Kyousuke feel a bit embarrassed.

Seeing the siblings flaunting their affection publicly, Renko muttered to herself. Due to the reflection coating on her eyepieces, the expression on her face was not visible. However...

"------"

Renko clenched her fists tightly, rooted to the spot in shock.

The aura of violence exuding from her entire body was vividly apparent to any observer.

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"Onii-chan?"

"Huh?"

"Love ya so much!"

"Owahhhhhhhhhh!?"

Ayaka pounced as soon as she finished speaking, almost causing Kyousuke's bowl to fall. While looking at Ayaka who was hugging his arm and rubbing her face against him, Kyousuke placed his "left-over rice bowl" back onto the tray.

"Say... How many times have you done this now?"

"Just forty-three times?"

"O-Oh..."

In the cafeteria that was packed with murderers, Kyousuke and Ayaka were sitting together, having lunch.

Flaunting their affection completely openly, Ayaka was attracting surrounding gazes.

Despite hearing words like brocon and siscon, Ayaka did not care at all, still hugging Kyousuke's arm happily, saying her 44th "love ya."

Sitting opposite to Kyousuke, Eiri held her hand against her temple.

"...You two, how close is your relationship, really?"

"Rather than siblings, it feels more like lovers..."

Sitting next to Eiri, Maina also looked at Kyousuke and Ayaka while holding chopsticks in her mouth.

Ayaka separated from Kyousuke and proudly puffed out her chest.

"Hmph. Ayaka and Onii-chan are family, plus our feelings are mutual! This bond is much much mu~ch stronger than between lovers. --Right, Onii-chan?"

"Oh..."

"Don't just go 'oh...'! Stop acting so lukewarm starting from a while ago!"

"...Really?"

"Yes! For the twenty-eighth time today already."

"Oh..."

"Twenty-nine! But you've only said "I love you" to Ayaka seven times today... You need to tell Ayaka 'I love you' even more!"

Pouting, Ayaka stared at Kyousuke.

Faced with the sulking little sister, Kyousuke wondered how to react.

"So annoying."

Just at this time, a gruff voice was heard.

Sitting at the opposite table, Renko sounded like she was talking to herself.

"Is that possibly what Kyousuke feels? But that's definitely how I feel."

" " "....." " "

Naturally, Kyousuke's group looked at Renko, but even the surrounding students also stopped eating and directed their faces towards her.

Renko hung her head silently, enduring everyone's gaze.

A cold and uncomfortable silence was spreading.

--But soon after...

"Onii-chan! A dog barked in an alley but let's forget about a loser of a dog and get on with lunch, okay?"

Insulting Renko in a roundabout manner, Ayaka made her message very clear.

Then her spoon reached for Kyousuke's "left-over rice bowl" rather than her own "left-over doria pilaf" and picked up a spoonful.

"Come, say ah~"

She moved towards Kyousuke's lips.

"------"

Kyousuke and Ayaka were within the sights of Renko's gas mask.

The blazing pair of ice-blue eyes were like see-through.

"...What's wrong, Onii-chan? Ayaka's hand is getting tired."

As Kyousuke trembled, Ayaka urged, waving the spoon.

Ayaka was making a statement while Renko was releasing murderous intent.

Caught in between the two of them, Kyousuke was breaking out in cold sweat, drenching his back.

Stuck in a dilemma over which of the two girls to please, finally--

Chomp.

"Yay!"

He took the spoon into his mouth.

Ayaka exclaimed in joyful triumph.

"Shuko..."

Losing in the contest, Renko was depressed. Comforted by her friends at the table, she prepared her packed jelly and straw, slowly getting ready to begin her meal.

Her depressed look was especially obvious in other people's eyes, completely listless.

Kyousuke apologized to Renko in his heart while Ayaka delivered the second mouthful.

"Come, Onii-chan, ah~"

"A-Again..."

"Hmm? You don't like it?"

"It's not like I don't like it..."

Being fed rice under public gaze was plenty embarrassing.

Eiri and Maina looked at Kyousuke's reddened cheeks in exasperation.

"...What an incurable siscon."

"...Kyousuke-kun is an incurable siscon."

Sighing simultaneously, they both started on their respective choice of leftovers. Despite being the first chance for the four of them to have a meal together, Ayaka only stuck to Kyousuke and ignored the others.

--However, this was perhaps unavoidable.

This was a long-awaited reunion between family, one for which Ayaka had gone as far as to attempt murder.

Kyousuke could understand her feelings in wanting to be indulged by him, without regard for anyone else.

Although Renko suggested it was "annoying", Kyousuke himself did not actually feel that.

No matter what, it made him very happy to be admired and loved this much by his younger sister...

Chomp.

"Yay!"

Indulging Ayaka again and opening his mouth, Kyousuke took the spoon into his mouth again.

Ayaka exclaimed shrilly with a happy smile on her face.

"Ehehe. Is it good? Oh sorry... These leftovers definitely can't be good."

"It's great."

"Eh?"

"If it's fed by you, Ayaka, it'll taste good no matter what."

"Really!? Thank you, Ayaka is so happy!"

"You too, have a mouthful, ah~"

Chomp.

"Is it good?"

"Yes, very good! Leftovers fed by Onii-chan, very yummy!"

Kyousuke and Ayaka fed each other, flaunting their affection publicly. Eiri and the others watched them as though they were going to attack with their teeth any moment, their hands stopped moving subconsciously.

"Th-These must be... the warning signs of mental shutdown. Rather than brocon, this is more like *brocra*, a browser crash?"

"Watching them makes me wanna die of embarrassment... Auau."

"------"

Eiri frowned while Maina went red in the face. Renko froze.

At this moment, Ayaka went "Ah!?"

"There's rice on your cheek, you always make others worry, Onii-chan..."

Ayaka took off the grain of rice on Kyousuke's cheek.

"Lick."

"Hyah!? Hey, what are you doing!?"

"Nothing much, just taking off rice that's stuck to your face, Onii-chan. What's with going 'hyah!?' Onii-chan's reactions are so cute as always. Kusukusu."

Ayaka stuck her tongue out and laughed strangely.

"Can't you just use your hand..." Kyousuke held his hand on his cheek, then in the next instant...

--Pop.

Renko had squeezed a pack of jelly so hard that it burst.

The yellow-green gelatinous substance flew and scattered all around, soiling her uniform.

"Oh dear oh dear, Renko, jeez..."

The girl beside her took out her handkerchief, intending to help Renko wipe up the mess.

Renko punched the table and stood up forcefully.

"Kyah!?"

The girl's giant body was knocked away, falling on the ground. The brown paper bag on her head fell off.

Nevertheless, Renko ignored all that.

Violently pulling out the straw she was holding in her hand, she threw the pack onto the ground, exiting the cafeteria in a huff, leaving all the other students in a state of surprise.

"-------"

Just before leaving, Renko only looked back once, towards Ayaka.

Even through the gas mask, Kyousuke could feel the destructive power of her sharp gaze...

"Oh... Onii-chan!"

"Wait for me here."

Ayaka looked up at Kyousuke who had stood up and grabbed his shirt hem.

Kyousuke gently took Ayaka's hand off his shirt and stroked her head.

"I'll be back soon. Wait here obediently with Eiri and Maina, got that?"

"Oooooh, b-but..."

Leaving the reluctant Ayaka behind, he chased after Renko.

Right now, Renko was wearing the gas mask that served as her limiter, wearing the device meant to contain her excessively intense killing intent and impulses, yet in spite of that, she was still able to exude an aura of nonchalant murder. Left alone, who knows what she might do.

Hence, Kyousuke ran. Pushing aside students blocking his way, he hastily chased after Renko.

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"...What are you doing here?"

The location was the staircase leading to the old school building's second floor.

On a higher step, Renko turned around and questioned Kyousuke.

The inorganic, plastic eyepieces were looking down at Kyousuke completely emotionlessly. Even her usually expressive voice was quite flat. This bloodthirsty atmosphere made her almost like a different person.

"Then why don't just continue to act lovey-dovey with your beloved Ayaka? Why are you going out of your way to chase me? Chasing a girl like me who's not worth loving."

"A girl not worth loving, that's not true--"

"Then you'll love me?"

"W-Well..."

"...You won't love me, right? The one you love is Ayaka. Then just follow Ayaka. Just follow the Ayaka who's the most important to you, the one you think about all day long. Put aside me, who's not number one in your heart, and go continue to flaunt your tender sweetness together with your Ayaka..."

Renko clenched her fist tightly.

Despite her cold tone of voice, she could not hide the intense emotions being conveyed.

Renko laughed "foosh" while Kyousuke was getting devoured by this pressure.

"You think I'll lose control and kill Ayaka? You think I'll kill her to relieve my displeasure... That's why you followed me?"

"...Yeah."

"I see... You really don't care about me after all. I'm such a fool for getting my hopes up a little. Shuko..."

Renko sighed quietly and slowly descended the stairs.

"...Yeah, the thought of killing Ayaka did cross my mind, you know? I felt an impulse *wanting to kill* despite wearing the limiter. However, Kyousuke--"

Renko went down four steps then stopped. Her voice also stopped.

Reaching for her ears, she took off the headphones she was wearing.

Standing there frozen briefly, Renko announced:

"I can't hear the melody."

"......Huh?"

"There's no melody of intent to kill, it's been silent all along... That's a first for me. Whenever I see how close you and Ayaka are, my heart fills with rage, it pisses me off so much I want to die, I really want the entire world to disappear right before my eyes! I wanna cry, wanna scream, wanna rampage, wanna destroy, wanna kill! But still, I can't hear anything. It's very quiet. So quiet it's terrifying, so quiet it's creepy, so quiet I can't calm down, absolutely incomprehensible... I can't stand it, so that's why I ran out here."

Moaning, Renko--Murder Made--clutched her head.

Born for the purpose of killing, Renko was an existence that linked all emotions to the act of murder to begin with. Driving Renko to kill people was excessive killing intent and slaughtering impulse.

Renko listened to them as though they were melodies.

The gas mask worn by Renko was the limiter for suppressing these melodies of killing intent.

Nevertheless, none of this mattered to Renko right now. The killing intent harbored by Renko did not turn into melodies to be played.

Faced with this unprecedented situation, Renko was understandably confused.

"I've killed tons of people to this date, you know? Once killing intent is heard, it keeps playing persistently. But right now, I can't believe that the melody is staying quietly yet silently telling me to 'go kill'... No, this is not an order from killing intent, rather, it's my own thought. Without being compelled by killing intent, this is simply the feelings of 'wanna kill' born from myself."

"Renko..."

Back when Renko was showing her true identity to Kyousuke for the first time, she had said:

--Even if I'm unable to produce killing intent, I can still generate feelings.

Feeling the desire to kill a hated target, that was also a very vivid emotion.

"Sorry. Actually, there's something you've gotten the wrong idea about."

"......Eh?"

Hearing Kyousuke suddenly apologize, Renko made a vapid sound.

Kyousuke faced the black gas mask and gazed towards the eyes that were hidden behind the eyepieces.

"My feelings for Ayaka aren't the kind of feelings you're thinking about. My love for her is the love for family, not for the opposite sex. I treasure her far more than all the feelings of the entire world, that's true... But they're not feelings that can be compared."

"Ehhhh!? But Kyousuke, when you rejected my confession--"

"Yes. That's why, umm... I'm sorry. The way I worded it made it seem like Ayaka is the reason, but that's wrong. It's got nothing to do with Ayaka. Whether or not Ayaka exists, I don't think my answer will change."

"...Then why did you reject me like that on purpose?"

"Because your misunderstanding would cause your killing intent to stop... That's why I didn't try to make a clumsy correction. I'm scared of dying too, you know..."

"------"

Renko stared silently down at Kyousuke who was explaining himself.

A sigh of "shuko..." escaped from her ventilator.

"In other words, this is what happened? You noticed that I misunderstood but didn't do anything about it, intending to use Ayaka as a shield to evade my advances. Is that the situation?

Starting to walk again, Renko descended the stairs.

"...S-Sorry."

Kyousuke took a step back and spontaneously averted his gaze.

"I see now. I understand very clearly what you want to tell me and why you want to apologize to me. But unfortunately--"

Instantly, Renko came alive.

She suddenly kicked the stairs.

"Uwahhhhhh!?"

Pouncing on Kyousuke on the staircase, she pushed him down on his back.

"...Guh!?"

With a sudden change in her depressed voice, Renko went back to her usual self.

"Rather, I want to thank you. Indeed, even if I'm not the most important girl in your heart, I never intended to give up, you know? It's just that seeing you two's public displays of affection, it was breaking my heart a bit. I felt like I couldn't

win against Ayaka no matter how hard I tried. But I was wrong, very very wrong!"

Riding on Kyousuke, Renko brought her gas mask closer to Kyousuke.

With the eyepieces almost touching his nose, Kyousuke could see his own reflection.

"But there's no need for me to win against that girl, right? In your heart, Ayaka is just family, not a member of the opposite sex. In other words, without me needing to do anything, the number one rival has already vanished! Then I can conquer you without anything to worry about, Kyousuke. Foosh."

"U-Umm..."

Feeling his life in danger, Kyousuke tried to change the subject without being obvious.

"Oh right! Now that the misunderstanding is cleared up, then you should make up with Ayaka--"

"Don't wanna."

"....."

Instant rejection.

Lifting her face up from Kyousuke's body, Renko shook her head.

"Even now, I still have the same feeling of wanting to kill, you know? Asking me to get along with her as friends, no can do. No can do! No matter how kind I might be as an older sister, that's impossible."

Renko shrugged.

"...I guess that's true." Kyousuke could understand where she was coming from.

Just as he was about to give up on Renko and Ayaka's relationship...

"--That being said, however."

Renko spoke cheerfully.

"Eh" went Kyousuke vapidly as he looked at the gas mask.

"That girl is your sister... Your family, right? For me, who's going to become your bride in the future, that's someone I have to build a good relationship with no matter what. Since it's something I need to face eventually, I want to build up intimacy between family with her. Kyousuke, you don't want a war between the wife and the sister-in-law, right?"

"...Well, I suppose."

Although there were parts that Kyousuke could not agree with entirely, Kyousuke still nodded. Wife aside, Kyousuke did want his friends and family to get along harmoniously.

"Unlike me, she's very frail... Because she's really just an ordinary girl. If you'll help, then Ayaka and I will be saved."

"Yes, leave it to me! I'll become good friends with Ayaka even faster than Eiri and Maina!"

Renko held her hands akimbo and puffed out her chest.

"Oh, I have faith in you, Renko! ...By the way, can you move aside?"

"Don't wanna."

"...Why?"

"Foosh." Renko laughed seductively.

"It's not every day that I get to pin you down on your back, Kyousuke, so why don't I attack you directly? Whenever I think about how your sister is stuck to you, Kyousuke, I want to get intimate and affectionate too... How about this,

Kyousuke? Let's not play feeding games of 'ah~' but go 'ah! ah!' together with me--"

"I refuse."

"......Why?"

Originally intending to lie down on Kyousuke's body, Renko moved her body away with dissatisfaction.

Kyousuke pointed at Renko's face.

"...The sight of this thing kills erections."

"Oh, so this thing is in the way huh... Shuko. It was the same last time at the open-jail school with the bikini, the biggest obstacle in capturing Kyousuke might be this mask after all... Oh my oh my. What a pain this things is. Does that mean you'll fall for me if I go back to my original appearance?"

Renko stroked the gas mask's surface as she murmured.

Kyousuke knew that Renko's true face was that of an otherworldly beauty's, hence she was essentially quite correct. Knowing he was going to be slaughtered the instant he fell for her, Kyousuke felt immense gratitude to the mask.

"...Well, whatever! A mere obstacle is something I'll overcome, just you watch! The more obstacles there are, the more intensely love burns... If a frontal assault won't work, I'll start by attacking the outskirts. Raising intimacy and affection points with the little sister, as long as the sister stands on my side, conquering Kyousuke will be a piece of cake, right? Foosh."

Renko laughed seductively.

The last half of her words were very muffled and Kyousuke could not quite catch them, but...

"Anyway! You can rest assured, Kyousuke. Now that I know she's not a rival, I'll devote my full effort to getting friendly with your sister. I'll name this the 'Sister-

in-law Ayaka Conquering Operation'! I'll get so intimate with Ayaka that it'll make you jealous. Foosh!"

It looked like her killing intent had already converted into motivation.

Seeing Renko raise a fist in high spirits, Kyousuke felt thankful for her dependability.

Question 2 - The Murderer with a Lady on each Arm / "The Silence Is Suicide?"

Hikawa Renko

Q: What is your target ranking for the final exams?

A: No target! But I'll do my best. Although by that I mean doing my best in terms of making moves on Kyousuke.

Q: Strongest and weakest subjects?

A: Best subject is Physical and Health Education while worst subject is sports. The mask gets in the way while my boobs are heavy...

Q: What will you do if you were granted parole?

A: Going with Kyousuke to this kind of place and that kind of place, as well as *that*~ kind of place, to do this and that and also *that*~...

Q: Please muster your vigor and make your exam declaration!

A: As long as I try, all challenges will be instantly overcome. Parole will be mine! Kyousuke's life will also be mine!!

The Silence Is Suicide?
両手に花と殺人鬼
問二

Q.期末テストの目標順位は?

特にないかな。私はベストを尽くすだけだよ。
京輔にはバストで尽くすだけだよ。

Q.得意な教科と苦手な教科は?

得意な教科は保健体育で、苦手な教科は体育。
マスクが邪魔だし、おっぱいが重いんだ……。

Q.仮釈放されたら何をしたいですか?

京輔と一緒にあんなところやこんなところに行って、
あんなことやこんなことがしたいな……もじもじ。

Q.テストに対する意気込みをどうぞ!

私にかかれば、どんな難問だろうと
瞬殺さ。仮釈放はもらったね!
京輔の命ももらったね!!

"Hey Onii-chan, why are all the first-years forced into this kind of place?"

The afternoon sunshine streaming through the window was casting a gridded shadow.

Walking along a corridor on the first floor of the devastated old school building where the entire wall was covered by graffiti, Ayaka raised this question.

Purgatorium School of Rehabilitation consisted of the two-storied old school building and two four-storied new school buildings. There was a total of three school buildings but the first-years were only allowed to use the run-down old school building.

The new school buildings belonged to the upper-year students' territory. Kyousuke had almost never visited there.

"Hmm? Oh, well--"

"It's like we're apples at the bottom of the barrel."

Just as Kyousuke was about to reply, Renko proudly explained:

"That's because first-years are different from the other year groups and haven't mended their ways yet. Their upbringing is poor. Rotten apples can't be placed together with ordinary apples, so this is just part of quarantine measures to prevent the rot from spreading, Ayaka-chan."

"...Ayaka's question was for Onii-chan, okay?"

Ayaka's smile disappeared and she glared coldly.

"Don't be so cold to me~ I apologize for my earlier attitude~ It's just a small misunderstanding, so let's get along lovingly, Ayaka-chwa~n!"

"Ahhh, can't stand this, please stop sticking to Ayaka, it's difficult for Ayaka to walk!"

"Oh my oh my," said Renko as she let go.

"Looks like I'm getting disliked... Shuko."

"Your first impression was too terrible. Oh well, just redeem yourself slowly through time."

".....Muu."

Ayaka pouted at Kyousuke while he was consoling Renko.

Using the free time after school, Kyousuke and the others were showing Ayaka around various parts of the school. Although Kyousuke was fine doing it alone, he decided it would be a good chance and brought Renko along aas well. Ayaka seemed quite unhappy about this.

"Really wanna take a walk with just Onii-chan alone..."

Grumbling, Ayaka looked quite listless.

"What's with this getup? A new gag? Are you waiting for Ayaka to ridicule you?"

"Ah, you finally ridiculed me! That's right, that's right. This is what I went out of my way to borrow from Kurumiya-san for the purpose of making up with you. Do you like it?"

The object Renko pointed at on her head was not the gas mask but the very realistic horse head.

This was what Ayaka was wearing this morning. The lustrous fur and sleek mane. The eyes, oriented towards different directions, felt quite creepy. Ayaka pouted more and more.

"Ayaka doesn't like horse heads. It's not like Ayaka was the one who wanted to wear it!"

"Uwah!? C-Crap!"

Nimbly, Ayaka reached for the Renko's head.

Renko tried to defend but was too late. The horse's head was taken off.

"*Kusukusu*, what a shame. Now, Ayaka will get to see your real face--"

Ambushing successfully from behind, Ayaka smiled and circled around to Renko's front.

"......Can't see it."

She hung her head in disappointment. As always, Renko's face was still covered by the pitch-black gas mask.

Covering her face up pretentiously, Renko laughed "foosh".

"Yes~, what a great shame! The horse's head was worn over the mask~ You've been played~ You've been played~, you know? You acted just as I predicted, you know~?"

".....~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~!"

Flushed red in the face, Ayaka stared while Renko triumphantly sang to the tune of "Go Tell the Teacher".

Without saying a word, Kyousuke knocked Renko in the head.

"Ouch! Kyousuke, don't go hitting people randomly!"

"You're being weird. Stop messing with Ayaka."

"...Siscon."

"What's that?"

Seeing Kyousuke raise his clenched fist, Renko went "kyah!?" and covered her head.

Ayaka sneered "kusukusu" and hid behind Kyousuke's back.

"Too bad! Onii-chan is on Ayaka's side. --Right, Onii-chan?"

"Yeah, that goes without saying. Brothers are always on the younger sister's side."

"Ehehe. Onii-chan, Ayaka loves you. Love you so much!"

Ayaka threw away the horse's head and hugged Kyousuke. Watching Ayaka rub her face against Kyousuke's chest again as before, Renko exclaimed:

"Foosh. Ayaka-chan really loves Kyousuke, I see."

"......Hmm?"

Probably surprised by Renko's reaction, Ayaka looked up from Kyousuke's bosom and gazed seriously at Renko. Then she resumed what she was doing.

"Of course! 'Really loves' isn't enough, Ayaka really really really really really really loves Onii-chan! Ayaka only needs Onii-chan... Ayaka doesn't need anything else. As long as Onii-chan stays by Ayaka's side, Ayaka will be satisfied. That's all..."

"......Ayaka."

Hugging Kyousuke, Ayaka murmured quietly like reciting a spell.

Seeing his sister so forceful, Kyousuke felt troubled.

"Yeah, I get it. I understand how you feel very well! Like you, I really really really really really~~~~~~~~ love Kyousuke too! Foosh."

Renko announced her feelings competitively.

"...What?" Ayaka asked quietly, separating herself from Kyousuke and glared at the gas mask.

"You love him as much as Ayaka loves him? What are you talking about? Don't lump Ayaka's love for Onii-chan with that shallow love of yours."

"It's not shallow at all! My love is very brutal. Heavy and intense. If you lump my love with that kind of light and shallow emotional love, I'll feel very troubled. It's like the difference between death metal and pop. It can blow away brains and eardrums, you know?"

Given it was Renko, Kyousuke can only interpret it as blowing brains away in a physical sense, a greatly scary notion. Kyousuke did not want to be killed by overwhelming weight, turned into a rag by super intense force...

But unaware of Renko's true identity, Ayaka felt no fear.

"Heh, is that so? Amazing~ Ayaka doesn't listen to death metal, that kind of music is only noise... It feels bad for the brain, but that'd suit you perfectly, right? Ayaka prefers nice and friendly pop."

Ayaka began to disrespect death metal. As soon as she finished speaking, Renko's voice went violent.

"Only noise!? You said it's 'only' noise!? Shuko... Ayaka-chan, it looks like you don't know anything. It's obvious for instruments, but there are actually many varieties to the death voices that sound like noise to noobs--"

Then Renko began to explain in a fervor.

About growls and gutturals, something about screams and screeches, something about sewers and drowning, something about inhaling and exhaling. After listening to her talk a whole bunch of incomprehensible babbling, Ayaka went:

"What are you talking about? Ayaka doesn't get it at all."

--That's all she said.

"What the heck!!!!!!!!?" Renko screamed using death voice.

She blew Ayaka back as though moshing. "What are you doing to Ayaka!?" Kyousuke gave Renko a headbutt as though headbanging in a rock performance. Renko went "Kyah!?" and fell on the ground.

Kyousuke helped Ayaka up and glanced sideways at Renko.

"...This is getting out of hand. Are you seriously trying to make friends with her?"

"Sob sob... This person definitely doesn't want to get along with Ayaka! She's actually pretending to make friends but trying to kill Ayaka. There's a cruel smile under that mask!"

"Ayaka-chan is the one who doesn't want to get along... Oh well, whatever."

Renko patted dust from her body while murmuring. Staying at the building entrance was not helping, so Kyousuke decided to continue showing Ayaka around.

After changing into outdoor shoes from their indoor shoes, they prepared to go outside.

Visiting the not very big school yard, the gymnasium and martial arts training hall, the small natural park called Purgatory Garden, he introduced them in order. During this time, speaking of Renko and Ayaka--

"Hey hey. Ayaka-chan. Is there any sport you're good at?"

"Good at everything as long as it's individual. But no good at team sports. Like ball games and stuff."

"Oh, I'm not good at ball games either. You see, these boobs are so heavy that it's just like carrying balls."

"...Ha. Too big also gets disgusting to look at. Right, Onii-chan?"

"S-Sure..."

"There you go again~ Not being very honest, are you? Despite playing with these balls of mine all the time."

"Hey, hold on. Don't just make stuff up, okay!? Ayaka's gaze is hurting me! The light has vanished from her irises... Excuse me, Ayaka-san? Why are you raising a bat--"

"Onii-chan... Jerk!!!!!"

"Gah!"

"Dead ball Kyousuke!"

"There are all kinds of animals being kept in the Purgatory Garden. Like chickens, rabbits, etc--"

"Also this kind of snake?"

"Uhyaaaaah!? U-U-U-Umm, that snake is... Eeeeeeeeek!?"

"Kusukusu. Why are you so afraid? Pink is so cute... Oh, you don't mean to tell me that you're afraid of this little guy? C'mere, c'mere, c'mere~"

"Eeek!? N-No... Don't! That snake has dangerous toxins!"

"Oh sorry, hand slipped.

--Plop.

"Uwahhhhhhhhhhhh! I-It bit me!!!"

"Renko! Hold on, I'll find Busujima-sensei straight away to get the antidote--"

"Onii-chan, don't panic so much. Ayaka thinks it'll be faster to suck the poison out, right?"

"Ehhhhh!? No, don't... D-Don't suck it!!!"

During the tour, there were many commotions.

By the end, Kyousuke and Renko were all covered in wounds, utterly exhausted. After going to the infirmary to get their injuries treated, they collapsed in exhaustion on the sickbeds.

Among them, only Ayaka remained lively and energetic.

"Hey Onii-chan. Can't we go visit the new school buildings?"

Ayaka asked with curiosity, looking at the map in the student handbook.

"...Hmm. Kyousuke sat up.

"No, although there's no explicit rule saying you can't, there's very strong opposition, you know? Even if first-years like us went over, they'll just treat us coldly. Forget about it."

"Eh."

Ayaka pouted.

"Let's go if it's not explicitly forbidden!" She shook Kyousuke by the shoulder.

Then watching this scene, Renko got up as well.

"Yeah yeah, let's go!"

She started shaking Kyousuke's other shoulder.

She was probably trying to get on Ayaka's good side by agreeing with her.

"Sigh, okay okay... I give up, I get it."

With no chance of winning one against two, Kyousuke submitted.

"Hurray!" Ayaka cheered whereas Renko raised both arms.

"Hurray, Ayaka-chan, eh--"

"Then let's go, Onii-chan?"

"...Shuko."

Trying to convert her banzai gesture of both arms raised into a double high-five but spectacularly ignored by Ayaka, Renko got depressed. At a loss, her right arm dangled powerlessly as she trailed after Kyousuke and Ayaka.

"Oh. Wait for me, Ayaka-chan! Don't forget me~"

"...Oh sorry. By the way, what's your name?"

"Eh!? I'm Hikawa Renko! Now that I think about it, you've never called me by name even once!"

"Not merely once, Ayaka will never call your name."

"That's so mean! So mean, Ayaka-chan... Sob."

"Please don't say the word 'sob' with your mouth. You're definitely not crying, right?"

It looked like these two girls still had a long way to go before they would get along.

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"Wow... What a pretty school building! It's quite different from what the first-years are using."

Standing before a shiny white building on a hill, Ayaka expressed her admiration.

Built some distance away from the old school building, the new building exuded an air of newness and grandeur. The tree-lined paths and flowerbeds were well-maintained while the roads were spotless.

Compared to the run-down old school building that was like a wasteland, even differences in atmosphere were readily apparent.

Standing at the entrance to the plaza, Kyousuke looked around.

"...Okay, let's hurry and--"

"Go inside."

Just as he was about to turn around and retreat, a voice pulled him back. Kyousuke frantically stopped Ayaka who was about to walk towards the entrance.

"Hold on, you've got things in reverse!? We're going back, not going in."

"...Why?"

"If you ask why..."

With the question thrown back at him, Kyousuke silently turned his head to check out the surroundings.

Even though it was after school, there were still many students moving about. Without exception, their gazes were directed towards Kyousuke's group. No, more correctly, it was--

"Foosh. Now that we're here already, let's go in for a look see. Don't worry, if we walk in openly like it's no big deal, no one will be able to tell that we're first-years. Stick out your chest!"

Doing what she suggested, Renko puffed out her chest, causing the voluptuous bosom to wobble and bounce elastically.

Virtually all the upper-year students were staring at her face and chest as they passed by.

"Hey, there's a girl with a gas mask over there, you know?"

"Nymphomaniac?" "Not a terrorist using poison gas, I hope?" "Someone should call the Discipline Committee." "Those tits are too big, by the way!?" "What cup size?" "Has anyone seen that chest and mask before?" "Nope." "They're unforgettable!" "...In other words,

those guys are first-years?" "Probably first-years." "Yeah, must be first-years."

This and other conversations could be heard from the upperclassmen.

Equipped with a gas mask and a giant bust, Renko's conspicuous sense of presence was still at work even in the new school building, attracting gazes incessantly, completely exposing the fact of Kyousuke's group as first-years.

Entering the new school building in such a state, Kyousuke could not help but feel apprehensive.

Stared at by the troublesome upperclassmen, what if they were to get harassed--

"Kyousuke-sama!? Is that Kyousuke-sama over there!?"

At this moment, a girl's high-pitched voice resounded in the surroundings.

The upperclassmen stopped whispering and silence descended. It was a familiar voice.

Kyousuke froze for a second before looking timidly.

"Ah, it really is Kyousuke-sama! Kyousuke-sama! Kyousuke-sama!!!"

"Geh!? Syamaya-senpai..."

A girl poked herself out of a second-floor window, waving to him.

The instant she made eye contact with Kyousuke, she jumped down from the window as though taking the stairs would be too much trouble, landing spectacularly and rushing up to him.

"Kyousuke-sama!!!!!!!!!!!"

"Guhu!?"

She hugged him without decelerating.

"Two weeks have passed since we last parted at the open-jail school. During this time, a chance to see your face again never came... I feel so lonely! Very, very lonely indeed! Nevertheless, I never expected you to come personally to see me, Kyousuke-sama! Ufufu. I am in such bliss... Ah, Kyousuke-sama! Please allow me to humbly express my affection and devotion to you, Kyousuke-sama!!!!"

The girl jumped into Kyousuke's bosom delightedly, rubbing her face against his chest.

Her lovely honey-colored hair was styled in curls while her emerald eyes were like gemstones.

--Syamaya Saki. The third-year senior student whom Kyousuke and the others had met during the open-jail school event.

"Umm... Calm down! C-Calm down--"

Kyousuke called out to Syamaya who was embracing him, unwilling to let go, but she did not listen at all.

"Kyousuke-sama, Kyousuke-sama... Ha~ Ha~ So fragrant... Ha~ Ha~"

"Go and die."

A rolling sobat struck Syamaya's head while she was drooling.

"Kyahhhhhhhhhhhh!?"'

Having suffered a kick to the head, Syamaya rolled around on the asphalt ground in pain.

"Shuko!" Renko entered a fighting pose.

"Seriously, what are you doing to Kyousuke!? I thought you were going to give up without a fuss... Are you trying to get slaughtered by me, Syamaya-chan!?"

"I-I-I-I-I-It's appeared!!! The monster has appeared!!!"

"Who's the monster!? That's a very rude thing to say to a girl! Do you want me to cut out your medulla oblongata!?"

"Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeek!?"

Sitting on the ground, Syamaya kept backing away, grabbing at the students around her.

At this moment, a hand descended on her trembling shoulder.

"Senpai."

"...Eh, what's the matter?"

Syamaya blinked her tearful eyes and looked up.

The owner of the voice was smiling while looking down at Syamaya who had her arms wrapped around her.

"What is your relationship with Onii-chan, Senpai?"

--The girl grabbed Syamaya's collar with both hands.

"Eeek!?" The dissonance between the girl's smile and action made Syamaya cry out in puzzlement and surprise.

The corners of Ayaka's eyes kept twitching as she exerted more force in her hands.

"Ayaka is asking you, what is your relationship with Onii-chan, Senpai?"

"O-Onii-chan? Kyousuke-sama... Onii-sama!? In other words, you are--"

"THAT'S NOT THE ISSUE HERE, OKAY!!!"

"S-S-S-S-So sorry!!!!"

Just as Syamaya inquired, Ayaka screamed hysterically and moved her hands violently.

Her head shaken forwards and backwards violently, Syamaya began to apologize mindlessly.

"...So, how did Onii-chan and Senpai--"

"Ayaka-chan, this senior students is... A serial killer who has killed twenty-one victims."

Just as Ayaka was questioning Syamaya who was dizzy from the concussive shaking, Renko, who had been watching quietly all along, declared in somber tone of voice.

"Eh!?" Ayaka released Syamaya and backed away warily.

"Twenty-one? S-So many... Unbelievable."

"Yes, despite putting up a front as though she won't even harm a bug, she is the Killing Maniac who kills people like they're bugs. Known as the Murderer Princess, she's a scary scary murder convict. Shudder."

"...Huh?" Seeing Renko trembling while hugging her shoulders, Syamaya was rendered speechless.

"

"--What's that?"

"Eeek!? Nothing at all!"

Syamaya cowered away as soon as Renko threatened her.

The fear engraved upon her heart during that time at the open-jail school still had not disappeared.

Pointing at Syamaya who was so frozen that even her tongue was stiff, Ayaka commented in surprise.

"...Somehow it feels like you're very very weak, Senpai?"

"It's all an act. Because she's a woman who kills without scruples, deceiving people without any conscience... Pretending to be a total weakling so as to make others careless, then finding a chance to kill them, that's her modus operandi. This woman's words and behavior are all lies... In other words, it's better to treat what she says as a trap."

Bullying Syamaya who was powerless to retort, Renko began to say whatever she wanted.

Ayaka backed farther and farther away from Syamaya, covering her mouth.

"Uwah... So underhanded. Why is this kind of person, with Onii-chan--"

"To kill him."

"Eh!?"

Renko explained in a fully serious voice.

"Ayaka-chan, this woman here... skillfully uses words and beauty to seduce the innocent Kyousuke, trying to make Kyousuke fall to her charms, intending to take his life as well! Throwing herself at him suddenly like just now, pressing her chest against him sometimes, barging into the bathroom naked on other occasions, assaulting him whenever the opportunity presents itself... Doing whatever she wants! These are all traps intending to seize possession of Kyousuke's body, mind and name."

"------"

Looking at Syamaya, Ayaka's eyes lost light.

"Aren't you talking about yourself...?" Kyousuke's retort seemed to have failed to reach Renko.

Unable to remain silent against these outrageous allegations, Syamaya resolutely protested in a brusque voice.

"Hold on! I hold back a little and you keep fabricating false accusations..."

Glaring at Renko, Syamaya stood up and walked over to Ayaka's side.

Her demonic image lasted for an instant before changing, revealing a smile like an angel's.

"Kyousuke-sama's little sister, may I have a little of your time? Hikawa-san's irresponsible allegations are false, completely baseless lies that cannot be taken as the truth."

"......Liar."

"Yes, she is a liar. I love Kyousuke-sama from the very bottom of my heart--"

"You're the liar!!!"

Ayaka screamed and slammed into Syamaya's body, sending her flying.

As Syamaya fell down on the ground with a "kyah!?", she spoke coldly:

"Do you think you can deceive Ayaka, Senpai? Please don't say something like loving Onii-chan so lightly. Please use your brain before speaking!"

"That's right! Think before you speak!"

Renko chimed in and reprimanded Syamaya.

Under the two girl's scornful gazes, Syamaya stood up in puzzlement, going "What!?"

"Why are you ganging up on me!?"

"Because you hugged Onii-chan."

"That's because you hugged Kyousuke."

"Ehhhh? Just because of that--"

" "Just!?" " Renko and Ayaka's voices overlapped.

"Ayaka-chan, did you hear that? This woman believes that hugging the opposite sex is nothing. She must be very used to skin contact with men. Seriously, what a slut."

"So true so true. She totally doesn't know how precious a hug with Onii-chan is in value! It's like casting pearls before swine or tossing gold coins in front of thieving cats. That's why she's a slut."

Scolded completely mercilessly, Syamaya went red in the face and retorted:

"I-I am not a slut! I am still pure in body! I have yet to experience ●● and ●● and ●● and ●● for real. ●●● and ●● and ●●●● have never progressed beyond the stage of delusional fantasies! Although I ●●● every night using Kyousuke-sama as my ●●, I am indeed a maiden in love. Besides, one day eventually, we shall... for real, gufufu."

" "U-Uwah..." "

"Why are you getting frightened!?"

"S-Sorry... It just feels very disgusting."

"Especially that 'gufufu' at the end, it's just tragic. Maidens don't make that that kind of pleasured look."

"What a shock!"

Syamaya clutched her head and leaned back in pain.

Gradually collapsing, she asked herself "Am I really that disgusting?"

"Yes. Disgusting."

"Yup. Disgusting."

"What a shock!"

Renko and Ayaka were completely merciless. Syamaya went completely pale.

Kyousuke pitied her.

"...Hey, aren't you girls being way too mean? Excuse me."

Kyousuke squeezed in between them and had Renko and Ayaka wait for him.

"Kyousuke-sama..." Syamaya's eyes shone as he extended his hand towards her--

"Hey!"

Just as Kyousuke was about to help Syamaya up to her feet, Ayaka chopped with her hand, striking Kyousuke's support for Syamaya. Going "Kyah!?" Syamaya fell to the ground.

"Oww... Hey, what are you doing!?"

Kyousuke cried out in surprise. In response, Ayaka's eyebrows shot up in anger.

"Onii-chan, you're the one who should be answering what are you doing! Why are you helping this woman--"

"Now now, don't be like that, Ayaka-chan."

Renko interrupted and consoled Ayaka.

"Because Kyousuke is too kind-hearted, he'll extend a helping hand to anyone without thinking. Because he's too innocent, he gets taken in by third-rate acting skills... When he's worried about others, he won't voice the dislike in his heart. But that's exactly the kind of attitude that suits that woman's schemes."

"No, that's not right. Anyway, why do you hate Senpai so much?"

"Then you like her, Kyousuke?"

"Well..."

Kyousuke could not find words to answer.

For example, Syamaya had ended up almost killed by Renko, but Kyousuke and the others had also nearly lost their lives to Syamaya.

Furthermore, unlike Renko, Syamaya was not wearing a limiter. Hence, it would not be surprising if she killed at any time. Compared to liking her, his feelings of fear dominated much more.

"See, he can't answer straight away! So that's the answer, Ayaka-chan. Foosh."

"So that's how it is. Ayaka understands. Despite clearly feeling dislike in his heart, Onii-chan is too considerate of her feelings to voice it... Poor Onii-chan. You're the worst, Senpai, Ayaka can't believe you're taking advantage of Onii-chan's kindness. Please stay away from Ayaka."

"Eh? Hold on, girls--"

"Onii-chan. This senior student here is a serial killer who has murdered before, you know? Who knows if you'll get killed or not... Ayaka is very worried. But you don't seem to care about Ayaka's unease at all? You're trying to approach this senior even if it means ignoring Ayaka? So mean."

"...Ugh."

Confronted with Ayaka's tearful gaze, Kyousuke backed down.

Even though he wanted to escape her gaze, Syamaya was also staring at him.

"Kyousuke-sama? The fact that you dislike me... It's not true, is it?"

Syamaya's expression and voice were both very blank, completely lifeless. Kyousuke could feel that she was looking very unusual. He tried to move his tongue that seemed like it was tied.

"Uh, umm... If I had to be honest, disliking--"

"Uwahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

--Disliking is not exactly true.

Without waiting for Kyousuke to finish, Syamaya bounced back up and ran. Running past Kyousuke and the others, she soon disappeared into the distance, shedding tears everywhere.

"The Murderer Princess... Crying because of a bunch of first-year brats?"

An upperclassman whispered in shock.

The silence was broken as a commotion started in the plaza.

"I can't believe that Syamaya-sama... U-Unbelievable. By the way, what's their relationship!?"

"Are the rumors true? Saki-san has fallen for a first-year boy..."

"Impossible! Senpai is our idol... She's our Madonna!"

"Can the fan club just shut up? Those guys, are they tired of living?"

"I'm grabbing my Tokarev." "I'll get my AK-47." "I shall retrieve my Japanese sword." "I'm getting the iron maiden." "Take care of this before the teachers arrive." "When do we kill them?" " " "Now!" " "

"Run away!"

Yelling, Kyousuke grabbed Ayaka's hand and ran at full speed.

"Wah!? Onii-chan, too fast--"

"Ayaka-chan, hurry! You'll be killed if you're caught!"

While Kyousuke and his group were running for dear life, dozens of crazed and furious upperclassmen were chasing after them.

Their eyes showed absolute seriousness. Some of them were even armed with weapons.

Just as Renko pointed out while being chased, they were not going to get off scot-free.

In this manner, Kyousuke, Ayaka and Renko's time after school was wholly consumed by a game of hide-and-seek versus the upperclassmen.

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"Damn it, those assholes really can run... Where the fuck did they hide!? Dig them out, even if they're hiding in a hole!"

"Free time is almost over~ There's no time for torture and interrogation~"

"Hyahahhhhhh! Make way for me, you little shits! I am passing through!"

"Woah!? That was close... What's with the modified motorbike just now? What is it, Mad Max era?"

"Hey, you fucking Mohican! How dare you race around on my beloved vehicle!"

"Geh... It's Lolimiya! Hurry and put your weapons away, everyone! It'll be a massacre if she sees them!"

"Huh!? Which pig bastard just said 'Lolimiya'? Wanna get flattened!?"

" " "....." " "

A childish roar shook the entire place as the commotion gradually grew distant.

After hiding with their breathing suppressed for a while, Kyousuke, Renko and Ayaka could not hear any further noise.

It looked like the upperclassmen had been driven away by Kurumiya.

"...It's okay now, Onii-chan?"

"Yeah, probably. Let's hurry and move it before those guys get back--Cough cough."

"Kyah!? K-Kyousuke... Where are you touching!? Don't, not there..."

"ONII-CHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAN!?"

"Umm... Don't go crazy, Ayaka! The ash will--Cough cough cough."

Kyousuke immediately opened the lid.

Then he rushed towards the light coming in through the square opening and climbed out.

Kyousuke and Ayaka were dyed white from head to toe. The siblings kept coughing while Renko casually went outside while going "great", equally white all over.

"It must've been tough for you two. Did you inhale ash into your lungs? Just kidding."

"Sob sob. A gas mask is so unfair... Cough, cough."

Coughing so violently that she was getting tearful, Ayaka glared at Renko with resentment.

Renko laughed "foosh" and quickly patted her uniform.

"Please control yourself, Ayaka-san. You have to stay still inside the incinerator."

"What!? And whose fault was it that--Cough, cough. Sob sob sob sob."

"It was dark and cramped, no helping it, right? It was unavoidable, Ayaka-chan."

Stroking Ayaka's back while she continued to cough nonstop, Renko consoled her.

Soon after when their breathing returned to normal, Kyousuke and the others patted the ash off one another's body while saying:

"But hiding in the incinerator was really a clever idea."

"Yeah. That's so smart! Thanks to that, our lives were saved."

"Ehehe. That's because Ayaka doesn't have much stamina. Ayaka remembered how she gets caught by 'it' during games of tag... So Ayaka is very confident in hiding! But why is the incinerator so large?"

"Uh, w-well..."

--Because apart from trash, there was other stuff to burn.

It was mentioned in one of the school's "Seven Wonders" but it was too horrible for Kyousuke to bring up. While hiding inside, he had seen slender white objects buried in the ash, but he hoped it was just his imagination.

"Shuko... Okay, now that the ash is off, let's get going! Be careful not to get seen."

"Yeah. Let's hurry back? Those guys probably won't run all the way to the old school building..."

"Hopefully. Those people won't give up that easily, right?"

"That slutty senior has pretty good looks and seems to have a ton of followers."

"Yeah. Judging from the way how those people are so tamed and under control, she must be quite the slut."

"Stinky, stinky! *Kusukusu*."

"...Come on girls, you're totally not reflecting on yourselves at all."

While walking on the path to the old school building, Ayaka and Renko were deeply engaged in the topic of Syamaya.

Although the content of their conversation was not something Kyousuke could agree with exactly, it looked like the two girls had grown closer through their experience of treating Syamaya as a common enemy and cooperating to escape

the upperclassmen. Watching the two girls get along so well, Kyousuke could not help but feel sorry for Syamaya.

He needed to clear up the misunderstanding, but his only choice was to apologize another time in the future.

"So, Kyousuke. Free time is almost over, you know?'

"...Yeah."

Renko pointed at the clock in the yard, which read 17:39 at the moment.

Free time after school lasted until 18:00, which was then followed by penal labor. Also, they needed to change into their gym clothes and gather five minutes before the appointed time.

"It's already this late huh... Being late will be bad, so let's hurry to the changing room--"

Mid-sentence, Kyousuke suddenly remembered.

Since exams week was starting this afternoon, penal labor was to be exempted.

Instead, they were supposed to return to their dorms before 18:00 to fulfill their self-study obligations.

"...Correction, let's return to the dorms."

Fortunately, they had dumped their bags at the dorms and did not need to make a trip back to the classroom. The upperclassmen seem to have withdrawn for now, so they were able to go back without worry.

Renko stretched and went "foosh", causing her voluptuous bosom to bounce. In a cheerful voice, she said:

"Oh my~ Not having penal labor is wonderful! Wearing this mask, visibility is bad and breathing is difficult, doing anything is hard."

"Then why don't you just take it off? ...Even if it's a gag, you don't have to follow through to the very end. Are you a comedian artiste? Or your real face is totally ugly?"

Looking at Renko's gas mask, Ayaka cocked her head in puzzlement.

Ayaka's suspicions were as strong as ever. She was probably still wary of Renko.

However, Renko did not get offended. Waving her finger, she said:

"No no no. It's actually the opposite, Ayaka-chan."

"...What do you mean?"

"Because my real face is too beautiful, that's why I have to hide it, okay?"

"...Oh, sure sure sure. So that's also a gag."

"Nope. I'm not lying. Honest to God. Rather than refusing to take off my mask... I am forbidden to take it off. No matter how hot, stuffy and inconvenient it is, I can't take it off. Do you know why?"

"Hey Renko! About this--"

Renko extended her palm and stopped Kyousuke from interrupting her.

Explaining about the gas mask inevitably touched upon Renko's true identity.

Broaching this subject would be a tough challenge given how Renko and Ayaka were just beginning to get along and cast aside their differences.

Now that they had become closer, revealing this subject might end up distancing them, or even add an unnecessary burden on Ayaka's mind. However, Renko explained without any hesitation:

"The reason why I'm not allowed to take off this mask is because my real face is too dangerous."

" ".....Huh?" "

Seeing the siblings' jaws drop in surprise, Renko sighed "shuko..."

Stroking the gas mask's surface, she spoke in a heavy, slow and emphatic voice:

"There's the description, ruinous beauty, right? That's precisely the nature of my beauty. Bewitching people's hearts, causing insanity. Those who've lost their minds on my account would fight one another, pitting their lives in an effort to compete for me... That's why I can't take my mask off. I don't want to see people getting hurt because of me. Sob sob... I-I--"

"...Pu."

"Hmm?"

Just as Renko was about to end her speech pretentiously, she looked at Ayaka.

Ayaka had stopped walking and doubled over, her shoulders shaking slightly.

--Then...

"Ahahahahahahahaha!"

Enduring to her limit, Ayaka burst out in laughter.

It seemed like Renko's farce had tickled her laughing center, causing her to laugh wholeheartedly.

"*Kusukusu*. What is that... Too funny! A narcissistic farce? Hoho... Seriously, Ayaka gets it. Ayaka will pretend you're a beauty! Although there not a single chance in a million. Ahaha! Such a funny person... Ayaka can't breathe from too much laughing."

Seeing Ayaka wiping tears from the corners of her eyes, Renko felt troubled:

"Umm... Why am I getting the feeling that I'm being belittled?"

"Because you said something retarded. What ruinous beauty..."

Seeing Renko act so seriously just now, Kyousuke was expecting her to come clean on her true identity, but in the end, it turned out to be a usual Renko-style joke.

It seemed to have taken Ayaka completely by surprise as well, causing her to roar with laughter. This was the first time since arriving at this school that Ayaka had shown a "true" smile to someone apart from Kyousuke.

"...Thank you, Renko."

"Hmm?"

"Nothing much."

Kyousuke turned his face away from the Renko who had no idea what he was thinking about.

Feeling embarrassed about his spontaneous gesture of thanks, Kyousuke felt something strange growing in his heart.

This warm feeling was--

"Onii-chan!"

Ayaka suddenly hugged him, scattering his thoughts.

Kyousuke crossed his arms and smiled.

"Tomorrow and the day after are holidays, right? How are you planning on spending them with Ayaka, Onii-chan?"

"...Hmm? Oh right, tomorrow is Saturday..."

The Purgatorium School of Rehabilitation ran lessons on a five-day week.

Different people spent their weekends differently.

Some played soccer on the field, some read books in their own rooms, some worked out, some chatted in the cafeteria, some played musical instruments in the music room, some spent entire days sleeping in bed...

Within the confines of the school's space, they could enjoy themselves and relax.

Although this question of "how to spend time" was unexpectedly difficult to answer for Kyousuke and the other students...

"We're having exams soon, so let's have a group study session together."

Before Kyousuke could answer, Renko made her suggestion.

On the opposite side of Kyousuke, Renko imitated Ayaka and wrapped herself around his arm, sinking Kyousuke's left arm into her voluptuous bosom's cleavage.

?!

"Ah!? Hey, what are you doing!?"

Ayaka released Kyousuke's arm and made her way out front pulling Renko away from Kyousuke's body.

She was filled with fiery hostility.

"Please don't push that kind of thing against Ayaka's precious Onii-chan!"

Her earlier smile was completely gone, instantly plunged into a bad mood.

Renko looked at her bosom and lifted it, sighing."

"Shuko... Ayaka-chan, these breasts are eyesores to you too?"

"No! What Ayaka finds an eyesore is you, the person."

"Eh!? And I thought we had gotten friendlier..."

"Ptooey!" Ayaka stuck out her tongue at the depressed Renko.

"You got carried away and forgot about personal space! Ayaka doesn't mind how you're noisy, but please don't touch Onii-chan casually. If you like acting familiar so much, you must be a slut too, I see?"

"I'm not a slut but I'm in a rut!"

"Fine fine fine, whatever. But no place wants a girl who wears a gas mask, right? And your true appearance is still unknown... Ayaka's not going to give Onii-chan to a nonsensical person like you! Absolutely, never ever!"

Ayaka gripped Kyousuke with strength that said "over my dead body."

Confronted with Ayaka's intense attitude of rejection, Renko hung her head in dejection.

"What a formidable little sister-in-law..."

But she immediately lifted her spirits.

"But I won't give up! If I'm not allowed to push, I'll just pull instead. If inserting snarky punchlines won't work, I'll stick to playing the fool. To make Ayaka-chan open her heart, I'll spread my legs open first!"

"What the heck are you spreading?"

"This is what a slut does, right..."

Seeing Renko never forgetting any chance to play the fool, Kyousuke stared in exasperation while Ayaka's arms lost strength.

"Foosh. Oh well, anyway, that's that. Pleased to meet you! Although I don't know what you're thinking, Ayaka-chan, I do want to get along with you! Okay, let's walk together?"

Saying that, Renko extended her hand to Ayaka.

They were at a fork in the road with the right side leading to the girls' dorms and left leading to the boys'.

Due to dorms being off-limits to the opposite sex, Kyousuke had no choice but to part ways with Ayaka and Renko here. Ayaka's body shook as she tightened her grip on Kyousuke's hand again.

"Onii-chan..."

"Don't worry. Renko is my good friend. She's not gonna eat you."

"Yeah, I'm a normal person who can't be more standard. I don't attack girls."

"...Meaning you attack boys?"

Renko laughed "foosh" but did not answer.

Ayaka sighed and released Kyousuke's hand.

"Oh well, whatever. I've got many questions for the mask too..."

"You've got questions? Cup size is G, by the way."

"...Onii-chan."

Ayaka ignored Renko's answer and stared at Kyousuke.

Her eyes were reminiscent of water surfaces at night, quivering with unease.

"We'll get to see each other again soon, right? Tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, we'll see each other?"

"Yeah, of course. I'll wait for you here every morning."

Kyousuke nodded and stroked Ayaka's head. Ayaka half-closed her eyes as though feeling ticklish.

"...Yes, Ayaka understands. Then there's no problem."

Ayaka smiled and walked over to Renko's side.

Renko's outstretched hand was matter-of-factly ignored.

"See you tomorrow, Onii-chan! Don't be lazy with studying."

"I know. You have to get along with everyone, after that, you need to--"

Kyousuke turned towards Renko who had withdrawn her hand in dejection, going "shuko..."

"I'm counting on you to take care of Ayaka. Together with Eiri and Maina, please help Ayaka for various things."

He bowed. Renko's sighing turned into high spirits and she raised her voice:

"Foosh! Leave things to me, Kyousuke! Even without Eiri and Maina's assistance... As long as I, Renko, still breathes in this world, I won't let anyone touch a hair of Ayaka-chan's!"

"You're not allowed to touch either."

"W-W-W-W-W-What did you say!? --Sob sob."

"Too bad~ Your plan is foiled! *Kusukusu*."

Dodging Renko's fingers, Ayaka jeered.

Kyousuke smiled wryly and walked along the other fork in the road.

"Then it's time for me to go. Don't quarrel, okay?"

"Yes, goodnight! Don't worry, we're not going to quarrel."

"Goodnight, Onii-chan! Let's spend tomorrow together, just the two of us."

"Objection! You're not allowed to hog Kyousuke, Ayaka-chan. We're all having a group study session together tomorrow--"

"No."

"Why!? Go outside if you want a piece of me, brocon."

"This is outside already. Stop talking nonsense and hurry."

"Yeah, sure."

"...I take back what I said. Ayaka, I'm leaving Renko in your hands."

Ayaka led the way towards the girls' dorms.

Please don't let anything happen while I'm not around--Kyousuke prayed while walking towards the boys' dorms.

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"......Muu."

Holding her mechanical pencil, Ayaka was pouting.

On the second day, Saturday morning, Ayaka's mood was in the pits.

"Ayaka was clearly determined to be alone with Onii-chan..."

"There there." Renko consoled the muttering Ayaka.

"There's nothing bad about this. Everybody studying together, we'll surely make progress. Foosh."

"That's right! Two minds are better than one. If the five of us cooperate, we'll definitely surpass a centegenarian's wisdom. There's no problem we can't solve together!"

"That's Mañjuśrī's Wisdom, right? You're treating this as an old hag's bag of wisdom?"

"...Yawn."

Maina held her pen with full vigor, Kyousuke made a witty comeback while Eiri yawned.

Ayaka gnashed her teeth, going "ooooooooh..."

"Making no progress at all, you're totally making things worse. Troublemakers, troublemaker A, B and C!"

Ayaka pointed at Renko, Eiri and Maina in turn, yelling at them.

"Hey." Kyousuke put down his pen.

"Didn't you girls improve your relations slightly in the dorm...?"

"No!"

"Did we?"

"I wish we did."

"Nope."

"No unity at all..."

Everything started an hour earlier. This morning, Kyousuke had met up with Ayaka then headed to an empty classroom to study for exams. He had heard Ayaka talk about the dorms. She was living in a single room, the bed was uncomfortable, the sentry was very neurotic and annoying, she had taken a bath with Eiri and Maina, Renko did not take off her mask even in the dorms.

Things were still fine then, but dozens of minutes after Kyousuke and Ayaka started studying, Renko and the others had suddenly appeared with their studying materials and joined them. This resulted in...

"......Muu."

This. Sulking, Ayaka tore her eraser to shreds.

Kyousuke and Ayaka were sitting on one side while Renko and Maina were on the opposite side of the table.

Only Eiri had left the table, playing with her nails in a bored manner.

"You have no manners, Cutting Board."

"Who are you to criticize me?"

Naturally, Ayaka was referring to Eiri as "Cutting Board."

It was apparently a nickname she came up with during bathtime last night.

"Shuko... Are you comparing your physical growth with a girl two years your junior?"

"...I'm talking about manners."

Eiri pointed at Ayaka who had her elbow on the desk, resting her chin on her hand.

Releasing the eraser that was falling apart, Ayaka sneered "kusukusu."

"Cutting Board is a total airstrip. I almost thought she's a man."

"...What did you say?"

"Hey... Stop that, Ayaka! Boobs are a sore point for Eiri."

"In other words, Cutting Board is very concerned about boobs? Yes, Ayaka now knows Cutting Board's weakness!"

"Speaking of which, aren't you an airstrip too, Ayaka-chan? Although you're only thirteen, but there's no bulging at all. There's not much difference from Eiri-chan's--"

"Shut up, Cun-chan. You're always so cunning, being so stacked when you're naked."

Ayaka randomly threw the eraser at Maina.

As a side note, the "Cun" of Cun-chan came from "cunning" with "-chan" added for good measure. Whether Eiri's "Cutting Board" or Maina's "Cun-chan", both were very mean nicknames.

"Awawa. Sorry, Ayaka-chan... Wearing clothes makes me look slim."

Despite looking a bit depressed, Maina's face still seemed a little happy.

Probably because she did not know where it came from, Maina seemed to be honestly happy about receiving a nickname.

"Ooooh... How nice! I'd like to take a bath with everyone too. That'll allow me to show off my prided figure. Shuko..."

"No one cares about your stuck-up figure, Mask. Anyway, Ayaka wants to see your face more than your body. You must take off the mask when taking a bath, right?"

"Foosh. It goes without saying that I keep the mask on even during baths."

"Liar. Didn't you take it off last time?"

The instant Kyousuke retorted reflexively without thinking, he drew everyone's gaze upon him.

They were all dumbstruck, their faces looking highly provoked.

"...Huh? Taken off, what the heck... No way, you were peeking at the girls' bathroom--"

"Immoral! Shameless! Criminal! I was mistaken about you..."

"Hey Onii-chan... Ayaka has more important things to teach Onii-chan compared to homework, you know?"

Eiri was shocked, Maina was disappointed, Ayaka raised her mechanical pencil.

By this point, Kyousuke finally realized he had misspoken.

"Huh!? No wait, you got the wrong idea! That's not what I meant--"

"No, we were taking a bath together."

"Y-Yeah, that's right! I entered the bath alone, but this girl barged in without wearing anything, pressing her boobs... N-NO, THAT'S NOT WHAT HAPPENED!!!"

That was actually what happened, but Kyousuke knew he would be in for a tragic demise if he told anyone about that experience.

The tip of Ayaka's pencil was pointed straight at Kyousuke's left eye while he was breaking out in a waterfall of sweat.

To prevent Kyousuke from escaping, her other hand had secured the back of his head firmly.

"...What's the matter, Onii-chan?"

--Click. Smiling, she extended the pencil lead.

"A-Ayaka...? Umm, your eyes are looking very scary--"

"Ayaka really wants the answer fast. Okay, hurry! If you don't hurry..."

--Click. Still smiling, she extended the pencil lead.

With every click of Ayaka's pencil, the lead extended towards Kyousuke's eyeball.

"Hey, hold on, it was a joke... I was just joking, Ayaka! Just a figure of speech--"

"Really? If you're lying, Ayaka will... be angry, you know?"

--Click click. The smile disappeared while she continued to press out more lead.

The black needle-like tip was only millimeters away from Kyousuke's eye.

"....."

Ayaka's eyes were as calm as the surface of a windless lake. Nevertheless, the shadow of seething anger beneath seemed like it could explode any moment.

Kyousuke's parched throat made a sound like swallowing saliva. Just as he was about to speak...

"Ha~ Fooled~ ya~!"

A fingertip intervened and broke the lead.

"Of course it's false. Trying to get near the opposite gender's dorms is so hard already, let alone peeping. Bathing together is unrealistic! Impossible."

Supporting herself with an arm on the table, Renko had leaned forward and denied firmly.

Unwilling to spill the truth, Kyousuke instantly went along with Renko's pace.

"Yeah, that's right, totally unrealistic! I already said it's a joke. How could you treat it as real... Hahaha."

"------"

Ayaka gazed doubtfully at Kyousuke and Renko for a while.

"What, so it's a joke after all! Don't worry, Ayaka was joking too."

She smiled again. Taking her hand off Kyousuke, she put down the pencil she was prepared to stab him with.

Renko went "shuko..." and returned to her seat, signaling an end to the commotion.

"...Seriously, that's going way too far even if you're joking, Ayaka. Pencils are for writing, not stabbing eyeballs. I almost thought I was going to get stabbed for real, sheesh..."

"Yes. If it turned out to be real, Ayaka really intended to stab for real, you know?"

"Eh."

"Just kidding. *Kusukusu*."

"....."

What a joke in poor taste. Kyousuke's face twitched. Ayaka leaned against his shoulder.

While scrutinizing the open practice questions and notebook, she said:

"Forget about that, let's study, Onii-chan. You don't want to fail, right, Onii-chan?"

"...Yeah."

Prompted by her, Kyousuke remembered.

They had gathered here for the purpose of studying, not horsing around.

Kyousuke gathered his concentration again and picked up his pen.

Exams at the Purgatorium School of Rehabilitation were not merely tests but deadly tests.

The passing threshold of "half of the average" was the line between life and death, but this condition was quite tricky.

Wanting to avoid Kurumiya's disciplining, all the students would surely study like mad. If everyone studied, the average was going to rise, bringing the passing threshold up along with it.

Also, Kurumiya was the one setting the test questions.

There was no telling how she was going to devote her full efforts towards making up underhanded questions to trap them.

"...The coverage is very wide too. It's time we studied seriously."

"Yes. Ask Ayaka if you don't understand anything! Ayaka will teach Onii-chan."

"Teach me... You know this stuff? You only just transferred."

"Of course!" Ayaka thumped her chest in response.

"This school's curriculum is only middle school-level, right? Then there's no problem. Even though the materials might be different, the main points remain the same, so it's basically like review."

"Oh, is that for real..."

The courses taught at the Purgatorium School of Rehabilitation continued from compulsory middle school education.

Due to the wide range of student ages, they went for the lowest common denominator. Many students would have already finished the courses before enrolling. Hence, the first exams after enrollment were supposed to cover an even broader range of topics.

Seeing Kyousuke understand, Ayaka smiled radiantly.

"So, Onii-chan. Aim for top three together with Ayaka, okay?"

A nontrivial goal.

Why aim so high? Just as Kyousuke was about to ask, he realized.

Achieving top three in the year group for final exams meant obtaining parole to go outside of school. Ever since he lost the drive to see Ayaka, Kyousuke had lost all desire for parole, but...

"If two people get on parole together, a date is possible! Karaoke, amusement parks, shopping, so many places to go and have fun."

" " "......!?" " "

Reacting to Ayaka's words were Renko and the girls rather than Kyousuke.

In the middle of moving the tip of her pen according to the melodies leaking from her headphones, Renko stopped. Staring at the practice questions, Maina's face bounced up. Eiri simply twitched once.

Out from their lips leaked the following murmurs respectively: "...Karaoke." "Amusement park." "...Shopping."

As silence returned to the classroom, Kyousuke's ambiguous answer was heard:

"Hmm~ That does sound quite attractive, but not enough to make me study like my life depended on it... Ayaka aside, ranking top three in the year is quite a challenge for me."

Compared to the first time when he first heard about the chance for parole, Kyousuke's difference in motivation was as disparate as heaven and earth.

Ayaka tried to cheer for and motivate Kyousuke who had given up before even trying.

"That's why Ayaka said Ayaka will help! If you're like this, let alone top three, you'll even be at risk for failing! Don't you want to date Ayaka, Onii-chan?"

"Uh, well..."

"I will teach you thoroughly!"

While Kyousuke was unsure how to respond, Renko leaned forward in front of him.

The gas mask approached, giving off messy ventilator sounds of "foosh!"

"Despite how I may look, I'm actually quite confident in my IQ, you know? Teaching you to reach top three will be a piece of cake! What do you want me to teach first? Mathematics? English? Or health education? Bashful bashful."

"Stop saying bashful with your mouth. I've got Ayaka to teach me, so I'm fine."

"Ehhhh!? You want your real sister to teach you health education!?"

"Ahhh, Ayaka can't stand this. Stop getting in the way! Go away, Mask!"

Ayaka forcefully shoved Renko's face away and yelled.

But Renko did not give up and circled around to Kyousuke's side of the table, bringing a chair with her.

"Foosh. Oh, are you stuck on this question? This is--"

Sitting on Kyousuke's right side, she started explaining.

Ayaka stood up with her face all red, intending to pull Renko away.

"Can't stand this!!! Like Ayaka said, Ayaka will teach Onii-chan!!! Give Ayaka's Onii-chan back!!! Give him back!!! Give him back!!!"

While Ayaka's cries resounded throughout the classroom, Maina tied a headband around her head. Written on the white fabric in large words with a black permanent maker: "Goal: Parole."

Her eyes were filled with motivation as she faced off against the practice questions.

"Top three in the year... This might be a reckless challenge for me with my poor mind. But even so, I'll bet everything on this. Kyousuke-kun told me before that 'feelings will definitely get through', that's why... I won't give up and I'll try my best to aim for parole!"

As a result, Maina moved her pen forcefully.

The noise level suddenly increased in the classroom.

Glancing sideways at this hustle and bustle, Eiri stood all by herself some distance away.

"...Parole whatever, like it actually matters. Stupid, aren't they?"

She yawned again, totally lacking in motivation.

Rather than holding a pen, she was having a pedicure and painting her toenails.

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"Oh another miscalculation! Hey, here here. Your method is clearly right, but what a shame... You can't half-ass things, Onii-chan."

"You need to take this chance to identify your weaknesses, okay? To reach the target of top three, low-level mistakes are fatal."

Sitting on his left, Ayaka compared answers while Renko made suggestions from his right.

Two hours had passed since the group studying started. Kyousuke had expected their revision to be peppered with idle chatter, but they were making amazing progress.

At first refusing to back down on the issue of who was going to teach Kyousuke, Ayaka and Renko finally reached a consensus that "helping Kyousuke learn was the top priority" and had a ceasefire, thus beginning to instruct him together.

--Renko's academic skills turned out to be quite unexpected.

Ayaka was studying while teaching Kyosuke but Renko was simply listening to music. The notebook she had tossed out was completely covered with caricatures she had drew of everyone.

Even so, when Kyousuke's pen stopped in the middle of solving a problem, she immediately went "Oh, this is..." and solved it within a blink of the eye, giving a perfect explanation. Even Ayaka was rendered speechless at her smarts.

"To think Ayaka thought you're a retard... Looks like genius and idiocy is only separated by a paper-thin line."

Praise that did not really sound like praise.

Even though Renko had claimed "My IQ is as high as 530,000!", she turned out to be quite unfathomable. Wearing a headband, full of motivation, Maina went:

"Awawa. I can't believe it's 53,000, that's too amazing... I can't win at all. Auau."

Looking at her exercises that were all marked with Xs, she felt despairing pressure.

Kyousuke could understand how Maina felt. With a pure genius like Renko appearing by their side, it was only natural to feel incurably incompetent and tragic no matter how hard they tried.

Among the group, only Ayaka was able to hold her own against Renko.

As much as Kyousuke thought that, there was also a warrior who still remained composed despite finding out about Renko's academic prowess.

"...Yawn."

Still showing a disengaged attitude, Eiri was rubbing her eyes. She suddenly yawned and looked out the window.

During this time, she had not even touched her exercise book once, only using it to cushion her nail care kit.

Having finished comparing answers with Kyousuke, Ayaka asked in surprise:

"Aren't you going to study, Cutting Board?"

"...No need."

"Oya?" Renko showed interest and got up from her seat.

"...Could it be that you're very smart as well, Eiri? How high is your IQ?"

"...Who knows. It's impossible to measure now."

"Oh my, I see. By the way, mine is 530,000."

"Sure sure sure."

Eiri waved her hand as though saying "so stupid."

"A-Amazing... She's totally unfazed by that number!" Maina widened her eyes, but everyone else knew it was a joke and were not surprised.

"Hmm? So Cutting Board is also the genius type... But Ayaka won't lose."

"...Nothing much. I'm not interested in competing."

Ayaka's competitiveness was fired up, but Eiri ignored her.

Swinging her bare feet, Eiri waited for her nails to dry.

"Muuuuuuuuu..."

Seeing Eiri so composed, Ayaka growled:

"What the heck is this? Are you saying that you won't lower yourself to compete with Ayaka!?"

"There, there. Ayaka-chan. Eiri is probably very strong? All the nutrients that were supposed to go to her chest has gone to her brain instead. I speculate her IQ to be--120 million!"

Hearing Renko, Maina went "Ehhhhhhhhhhh!? A-A hundred and twenty million!?" Falling from her chair in surprise. "...Huh?" Eiri frowned.

"So noisy. If you've got the leisure to chat, just go study, okay?"

"No, you have no right to say that."

Ayaka retorted and waved her hand as though going "no no."

"...Tsk. Forget about me. Like I said, no need. Studying or whatever, it's a total waste of time--"

"Lemme see, lemme see. How's your progress?"

While Eiri was sweeping her bangs aside, Renko picked up Eiri's exercise book.

Instantly, Eiri's face changed with alarm.

"You...!?"

She frantically tried to snatch it back, but Renko turned lightly to evade. Pulling the exercise book out from under the nail care kit, she left Eiri's seat.

"...A-Amazing."

Flipping through the mathematics exercise book, Renko exclaimed.

Repeating "amazing" to herself again, Renko yelled out in amusement:

"A perfect score of all wrong!"

" " "Eh!" " "

...All wrong instead of all correct?

Ignoring Kyousuke and the others who were totally shocked, Renko continued:

"Not just calculation mistakes, but your method of solving is also wrong! Uwah... I can't believe you got these basic questions all wrong. In fact, I find you very amazing. Don't you listen properly in class?"

"Eiri..." "Eiri-chan..." "Cutting Board..."

"------"

While everyone's gaze was focused on her, Eiri looked out the window.

Legs crossed, she was resting one elbow against the desk.

"L-Like it matters... This stuff has nothing to do with killing people. It's not like it'll pose a problem for daily life. To me, it's not essential. What's the use of formulas and whatever?"

...Totally stupid. Eiri remarked in a foul mood.

Despite sounding totally self-justified, her face changed rapidly.

"Eiri!" Renko shook her by the shoulders.

"You can't escape reality! You'll need supplementary lessons at this rate!? You might even fail the make up exams!? Dating Kyousuke during parole will remain a dream--"

"Shut up!"

Eiri shook Renko's hands off and glared at the gas mask.

Despite the sharpness of her gaze, large teardrops were gathering at the corners of her eyes.

"Because, I can't help it either... I-I just don't know how to do it. I don't want to be treated as an idiot and it pisses me off if I had to ask you to teach me, plus there's only a week left. I was thinking I'd be fine as long as I get above half of the average, so--"

Eiri bit her lip hard and hung her head in depression.

"Eiri..." Renko's voice sounded sad.

"Clearly lacking boobs and you're no good at studying... Where did all your nutrients go?"

"Ayaka can't believe you haven't even reached the level of Year 1 in middle school... Cutting Board, you're a retard."

"Eiri-chan... It's not that you don't want to aim for parole, but you have no choice, I see."

"Shut up, all of you! She, umm... has many difficulties of her own, okay."

Such as family reasons. Growing up in a family of assassins, Eiri definitely had no time to study, spending each and every single day on honing killing techniques.

Just like Kyousuke who had spent all his time on fighting and working out, leaving no time to study--Probably something like that.

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KILL

"W-What...? Don't gang up to look at me with such eyes! Math is a total mess because it's my worst subject. I should say that my other subjects are better, so basically, umm..."

"You don't need to say anymore."

"...Huh?"

Renko spoke with a sorrowful voice while placing her hand on Eiri's shoulder.

"You don't have to put on a brave face, Eiri. I'll teach you. I'll dissolve all of your questions and eliminate all of your worries. So, let's study together with me, okay?"

"Renko..."

Eiri opened her eyes wide and turned her face away.

Her lips opened and closed with great difficulty.

"...Th-Thanks."

She nodded with upfront honesty.

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The noon bell rang in the unused classroom on this holiday.

Writing vocabulary down randomly in a notebook, Kyousuke put down his pen and breathed out "...phew."

Stretching his stiff body, Kyousuke took a look at everyone's condition.

Having recombined desks together, Eiri was accepting Renko's enthusiastic instruction. Holding the textbook in both hands, Eiri stood up at Renko's request to recite the English.

"*The death of one is a tragedy*."

"No good no good. Too quiet. Again!"

"*The death of one is a tragedy*!"

"There's totally no emotion!"

"*The death of one is a tragedy*!!"

"That's right! One person's death is a tragedy! But--"

"*Death of a million is just a statistic*!!! A million people dying is just a statistical number!"

"Yes, you've remembered it! This English passage is remembered!"

"Wow, congrats! *KON-GU-RA-CHU-REI-SHON*!"

Although less than an hour had passed, Eiri's learning was progressing smoothly too. Because Maina was also receiving Renko's instruction, Kyousuke and Ayaka were currently going at it one-on-one.

"...*Kusukusu*. How wonderful that Cutting Board is an idiot"

Ayaka snickered and leaned over. Her stomach began to rumble.

Instantly, Ayaka went "kyah!?" and moved away, her face going red.

"Ah... C-Could you pretend you didn't hear that?"

"Dummy, there's no need to push yourself that hard. It's time, anyway. Let's take a break."

".....Sob."

Ayaka lowered her gaze shyly, holding her stomach. We've been living together for so long, how many times have I heard your stomach growling already? -- Kyousuke smiled wryly as he stood up.

"Say, what are you girls planning for lunch? I'm going to buy lunch."

"Hmm?" Renko looked up and glanced at the wall clock.

"...Oh, it's already noon."

"Yeah. Since we have a lot of work to do, I'll just buy for everyone. What do you girls want?"

--That being said, the only choices were "leftover bread" and "cold rice balls."

Although there was also the "freshly-baked bread" but they only offered one, which meant it would sell out immediately. Kyousuke wondered if he would make it if he went right now.

"It's okay. I have my usual jelly, but thanks for the drink."

"...I'll have the rice ball. Tea for a drink, please."

"I want, umm... Bread and strawberry milk!"

"I-It's appeared!!! I can't believe there's strawberry milk. As expected of Cun-chan."

Ayaka was exceptionally surprised. Maina went "i-it's not that outrageous" in embarrassment.

"Got it. Then we'll be right back."

"Or maybe we'll never return, but don't mind us if that happens!"

After confirming everyone's choices, Kyousuke and Ayaka left the classroom.

Walking side by side along the deserted corridor, they made their way to the snack shop on the first floor.

"...Ara, Kyousuke-kun."

Along the way, going down the stairs, they ran into an acquaintance.

"Woah!?" Ayaka screamed shrilly and jumped at Kyousuke's arm.

The round eyes peered down at Ayaka from behind the small holes in the brown paper bag.

"So this cute little girl is your younger sister who transferred here?"

"O-Onii-chan... Who is this person? No... What on earth is this thing?"

Still hugging Kyousuke's arm, Ayaka looked up at the unusual girl.

Suddenly running into this kind of person, no wonder Ayaka was afraid.

"Oh, she's Bob. Like Renko, she's a student in Year 1 Class B. Despite how she looks, she's actually a good person, so don't worry. --So, this is my little sister Ayaka."

"This is our first time meeting, right? Nice to meet you, Ayaka-chan!"

"...N-Nice to meet you."

Ayaka timidly shook the friendly hand that was extended towards her.

Bob laughed "ufufu." Just as they were about to release their hands...

".....Kyousuke-kun's. Little sister."

A girl poked her face out from behind Bob.

Petite. Long black hair. Blood-red eyes. She stared and observed Ayaka.

Transparent drool leaked out from her half-opened mouth.

"Very skinny... But looks tasty... Yumm."

The girl revealed her well-developed double teeth and licked her lips.

"Wah!?" Ayaka screamed again, hiding behind Kyousuke's back.

"Ah... Don't act like that! What are you saying to someone you're meeting for the first time, Chihiro? It's very impolite."

Bob hastily picked up the girl--Andou Chihiro--in her arms and wiped her drool with a handkerchief while saying:

"Sorry, Ayaka-chan. Chihiro can't control herself whenever she sees human flesh."

"Eh!? H-Human... flesh?"

"...Yeah. It's very tasty when eaten with fat, you know? Cheeks and thighs... Yumm."

"O-Onii-chan... This person is scary."

Ayaka trembled as Chihiro stared at her face and thighs. Without Bob holding her back, she looked like she would pounce any second.

Seeing those blood-red eyes shining brightly, Bob opened the bag she was carrying.

"Ara ara, you must be starving. Here you go, endure for a while, okay?"

Unbelievably, what Bob took out was the "freshly baked bread."

Seeing the legendary merchandise that Kyousuke never had the luck to try out, Chihiro's eyes shone.

"Chomp."

"Owwwwwww!"

Rather than the bread, Chihiro bit Bob's finger.

Chihiro's double teeth were biting hard on the thick skin, going chomp chomp while she began to savor the taste.

"Seriously," Bob sighed and picked up the bread that had fallen on the floor.

"...Whatever. So you're preparing for exams, Kyousuke-kun?"

"Yeah, that's right..."

Kyousuke nodded while Chihiro continued to hang onto Bob's finger.

"We're studying in the second-floor empty classroom with Renko and the others and currently out to buy lunch."

"Ara ara, is that so? Sorry for delaying you for so long. Chihiro and I are also studying in the Class B classroom. Come over to play whenever you want."

"Oh okay. I'll let Renko and the others know... Is Michirou there too?"

--Suzuki Michirou. Also known as Makiyouin Kuuga. Always going on and on about his left arm, that whatever Azrael. Kyousuke felt that broken bones were going to result if he had to study in a room with that guy.

Bob cocked her head.

"No idea. Michirou-kun is a lone wolf."

"I-I see..."

During the open-jail school event, he seemed to be hanging around those girls just because he was assigned to the same team.

"...Onii-chan's friend?" Because Ayaka asked, Kyousuke replied "Friend...? Not really."

"Ara ara. Poor Michirou-kun." Bob laughed awkwardly and picked up Chihiro again.

"Then we'll be going back. Good luck with your studying! Ayaka-chan too, goodbye! Come over for some relaxing tea when you're free? Ufufu."

"Yeah. See you later. Good luck to you too."

"Bye. Although Ayaka doubts there will be a chance for tea."

Waving to Kyousuke and Ayaka who were seeing her off, Bob ascended the stairs.

"Bye bye!" Before departing, Chihiro flashed a bright double-toothed grin.

Soon after, they disappeared upstairs.

"Haaaaaaaaa~..."

Ayaka sighed as though clearing all the air from her lungs.

Moving from behind to in front of Kyousuke, she gazed up at him in a pleading manner.

"Onii-chan... Why do you have no friends apart from girls?"

That was what she asked. Her scornful eyes pierced Kyousuke like a sharp arrow.

Confronted with his little sister's unbelievably intimidating pressure, Kyousuke was stunned.

"A-Apart from girls..."

"Apart from girls, there are none, right? Male friends?"

"Of course I do!"

"For example?"

"F-For example, there's--"

Mohican, Shinji, Usami, Oonogi... etc.

Going through the names of all the boys he knew, Kyousuke's conclusion was...

"...Michirou."

"You just said he didn't count."

"Guh!? R-Really..."

Faced with the sharp accusation, Kyousuke groaned.

Ayaka's gaze grew increasingly vicious and the furrow in her brow deepened.

"Hey Onii-chan... Why, why do you have no friends apart from girls?"

Ayaka's face gradually pressed near.

Her pitch-black eyes reflected Kyousuke's wavering image. Kyousuke felt as though he might be sucked into those eyes any time.

"Should I say it simply happened naturally? Or I guess they approached on their own..."

"They approached on their own? Really? Then Onii-chan must be super popular just as Ayaka thought!"

Repeating Kyousuke's words, the corners of Ayaka's lips relaxed.

But still, her eyes did not smile at all.

"Well... Think about it, I am the one who's treated as the mass murderer of twelve, y'know? That's number one in the entire year. In a normal school, people will surely hide away from me, but..."

Called "Anthrax" and "Metallica" in the past by others, Kyousuke would instill abject fear into any female student in the same grade as soon as they made eye contact. All it took him was a single sentence to make them cry. Asking for their emails would make them give up their cash. Confessing would end up with the girls kneeling on the ground, begging for mercy.

But unlike a normal school, this place was the complete opposite.

"Rather than fear, those people seem more interested in me as the murderer who had killed twelve victims. It's because only the girls approached me, the boys are jealous..."

"So you mean the boys see you as an eyesore, Onii-chan?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

"Hmph~..."

Ayaka turned her gaze away and bowed her head.

Soon after, she looked up and stared at Kyousuke.

"--Happy much?"

She asked.

"......Eh?"

Suddenly asked such a question by her, Kyousuke was stunned.

Ayaka grabbed Kyousuke's chest and asked as though seeking support:

"Being so popular, does it make you happy? Girls used to hide from you, but now they're offering themselves to you by the truckload, happy much? Who knows why there are so many beauties, you must be very happy--"

"No, not necessarily."

".....Eh?"

"Although it's a nice feeling, receiving other people's affections... But they're all murderers, y'know? They're essentially people who're getting involved with me just because of those false charges. To be honest, it really troubles me."

"Troubled!? Onii-chan feels troubled?"

Kyousuke smiled wryly at Ayaka who was asking him with eyes opened so wide they were round.

Recalling the countless absurd confessions and approaches, he whispered in an utterly exhausted voice:

"Doesn't that go without saying? I'm a normal guy... I totally can't understand those people's thoughts and interests. No matter how popular I am, it's meaningless if I die."

Almost killed so many times, Kyousuke could not laugh at all.

If someone wished to take his place, he would accept it in a heartbeat.

"So that's how it is..." Perhaps Kyousuke's troubles were finally conveyed to her, Ayaka's face grew gloomy.

But then it immediately turned into a smile.

"Oh okay! Being so popular with girls doesn't make you happy, it troubles you! Yes yes. Oh my... You scared Ayaka so much. Ayaka was thinking Onii-chan had turned into a womanizing playboy. *Kusukusu*."

Ayaka released Kyousuke and started to skip in a lively manner.

The somber atmosphere was blown away at once. Her mood cheered up completely. Although Kyousuke felt troubled by Ayaka's capriciousness, he still chased after her.

Walking by Ayaka's side, Kyousuke whispered:

"Life wouldn't be so tough if I really could turn into a womanizing playboy."

"*Kusukusu*. Same old problem of age = the number of years without a lover?"

"Shut up. Aren't you in the same boat?"

"Yes. But Ayaka has Onii-chan, so Ayaka has no use for a lover."

"Oh..."

"Why are you getting shy, Onii-chan? No way, you actually want Ayaka to be your lover, Onii-chan--"

"Of course not. You're my sister, not my lover. This relationship will never change."

"Ahaha. Of course! Absolutely never ever change, right?"

"Yeah. No matter what happens, it won't change. Because we're *family*, right?"

"Yes! Till death do us part, right?"

While having this kind of conversation, they held hands as they walked through the corridor.

"...Yeah. But even if I have to die, I ain't gonna let 'em kill us."

Lightly, greatly cherishing it, Kyousuke held that warmth which seemed as though it might break if he applied greater force.

Inside this school where they were surrounded by psychos everywhere, he poured his powerful thoughts and feelings into protecting this tiny hand.

Question 3 - Hate Breed / "You Call That A Knife?"

Igarashi Maina

Q: What is your target ranking for the final exams?

A: I'll try my best to avoid failing! Also, I want to enter top three as much as possible!

Q: Strongest and weakest subjects?

A: Best subject is Ethics, worst is Home Economics. Especially cooking practicals... Auau.

Q: What will you do if you are granted parole?

A: Something that won't cause trouble to society. Also, umm... A visit to a grave.

Q: Please muster your vigor and make your exam declaration!

A: Let's do our besht! Ahhh, screwed up... I bit my tongue during the Q&A. Awawa.

You Call That A Knife?

ヘイト・ブリード 問三

Q.期末テストの目標順位は?

赤点とらないように頑張りたいです!
あと、できれば三位以内にも入りたいですっ!

Q.得意な教科と苦手な教科は?

得意な教科は道徳で、苦手な教科は
技術・家庭です。特に調理実習が……あうあう。

Q.仮釈放されたら何をしたいですか?

世間の迷惑にならないようにしたいです。
あとは、その……お墓参りに。

Q.テストに対する意気込みをどうぞ!

頑張りまちゅ!
ああ、かんじゃいました……
解答欄ではかみませんように。はわわ。

"Can anyone solve this problem?"

On Saturday, the five of them, Kyousuke, Ayaka, Renko, Eiri and Maina continued to study together until night. On Sunday, Kyousuke studied with Ayaka alone.

Then came Monday. First period was Mathematics.

The blood-red pipe tapped the blackboard as Kurumiya swept her gaze over the students. Lying at her feet was a boy with smashed glasses, bleeding from his head, his body convulsing uncontrollably.

Next to the answer written in chalk by the boy, there was a large "X" written using his own blood. Those who got the answer wrong were met with a tragic fate.

Veins bulging on the corner of her forehead, Kurumiya gently tapped the blackboard.

"...Hey, anyone? --HUH!?"

She swung down. The lectern was flattened by the pipe while white chalk dust flew all around.

A certain student's atrocious act was the cause of Kurumiya's poor mood today.

That certain person had ridden Kurumiya's modified motorbike all the over the place in a frenzy, ending up in an accident that had reduced her favorite vehicle into scrap metal.

Then on Saturday, when the student had taken a grenade launcher out to play "fireworks display", Kurumiya had ripped the grenade launcher's tube apart with her bare hands then pummeled the guy.

One would have expected the guy to die, but the next morning, he was witnessed energetically breakdancing with Kurumiya's panties worn over his head at the entrance to the school building.

Thanks to that fucking bastard, Kurumiya's wrath went through the roof early this morning. Three students had already fallen prey to the steel pipe. Everyone was cowering in fear.

"Yes, Ayaka knows this one!"

Sitting on Kyousuke's right, a girl spoke up energetically.

Ayaka swiftly raised her hand with confidence written all over her face.

"Very well. Come on up, Kamiya the younger."

"Yes!"

While the inhumanely destroyed boy was taken away by the medical team on a stretcher, Ayaka stood in front of the blackboard and began to write fluently.

Kyousuke watched his little sister's gallant and self-sacrificing figure.

"--Correct answer."

Kurumiya wrote a ◎ next to the answer to indicate correctness then stroked Ayaka's head.

Her demonic visage completely disappeared, giving rise to a radiant smile.

" " "......!?" " "

The classroom entered an uproar upon seeing this rare face from Kurumiya.

On her innocent prepubescent face was a radiant smile. Ayaka also half-closed her eyes in pleasure. The two of them looked like sisters or friends who were very close.

Kurumiya was praising Ayaka with a completely different attitude than towards the earlier student who attempted the problem.

"Stepping up fearlessly under heavy pressure and splendidly writing out this answer, your courage is worthy of commendation. You also answered perfectly despite transferring recently. Well done!"

"Thank you very much, Kurumiya-sensei!"

"Yes. Kamiya the younger is outstanding. Kamiya, you should feel proud of her."

"Ehehe."

" " "....." " "

Kurumiya lavishing praise on a student was totally unheard of.

Whether the cheerful expression or sincere words, none of it showed the usual signs of Kurumiya.

Faced with the kindess revealed by the demonic teacher for the first time, the students were speechless.

On the other hand, having transferred here at the end of last week, Ayaka did not question Kurumiya's attitude, returning to her seat proudly.

"You bunch of swine should take Kamiya the younger as your role model, got that? Next week in the finals, if you can't even solve this kind of simple applications question, all bets are off. Answer properly for me next time--Capish?"

" " "Yes, ma'am!" " "

"A good answer. Now that's the spirit."

" " "Yes, ma'am!" " "

"Excellent. If no one had raised their hand just now, I would have massacred everyone, you know?"

Kurumiya flashed her double teeth then began to explain problems.

Her bad mood had apparently dissipated to some extent. She then continued this rare instance of a peaceful lesson, still extremely intimidating but not resorting to unreasonable violence.

Kyousuke had Kurumiya pegged as the most likely person to harm Ayaka, but...

"Then there's the second part to question four. Answer, Kamiya the younger."

"Yes! x=7"

"Correct. You're really good. I'm expecting great things from your finals."

"Ehehe... Ayaka will do her best, Kurumiya-sensei!"

Sadism had turned into reward. Kurumiya's hand of violence was stroking Ayaka's head.

Kyousuke was deeply troubled by Kurumiya's attitude towards Ayaka.

However, after praising Ayaka, Kurumiya would inevitably add the following behavior:

"Conversely, Kamiya... Oh my oh my, what a huge difference between flesh-and-blood siblings. Don't you feel ashamed? Learn from your little sister, retarded older brother."

"...I-I'm very sorry."

It was true that Ayaka was outstanding, so Kyousuke was already used to being compared to her.

Rather, she was his pride as the older brother. However--

"*Kusukusu*. Don't mind it, Onii-chan."

Ayaka smiled at him and did not get angry about Kurumiya scolding Kyousuke. It seemed like she was subtly admiring Kurumiya...

Complicated feelings were gathering in Kyousuke's heart.

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"Eh? Ayaka thinks she's a good teacher..."

During the break after first period, Kyousuke told Ayaka not to trust Kurumiya, resulting in a troubled look on Ayaka's face.

Kyousuke shook his head.

"She's someone who'll resort to merciless violence, even against girls, just because she sees something that rubs her the wrong way, you know? Although she's been acting kind and benevolent right now, it's impossible to tell what's villainous plots are going on in her mind. I've suffered at her hands a number of times. You really have to pay extra attention when around the teaching staff here."

Despite Kyousuke's careful warnings, Ayaka's expression remained unchanged.

Looking around the devastated classroom that was all covered in graffiti, Ayaka frowned in surprise.

"Onii-chan, you're asking Ayaka to be careful of the teachers... Isn't that reversed? This place is the school for murderers to reform themselves, right? Then the ones at fault are the students, not the teachers. Isn't the people on the receiving end of violence at fault themselves...? Also, since you're treated as a murderer of twelve, Onii-chan, it can't be helped that you suffer."

"...Well."

Ayaka's words made Kyousuke silent.

In fact, Kyousuke used to think the same way. But that was before he learned of the school's true purpose.

This was a school to train convicted murderers into professional killers, not for reforming them back to normal members of society. All the teachers including

Kurumiya were professional killers, even more dangerous beings than convicted murderers.

Kyousuke was also hesitating whether to tell Ayaka about this or not.

But seeing as this kind of secret must not be leaked to the other students, Kyousuke had to find another chance. Since courses for killers started in the second year, the truth was hidden from first-years.

"Well, I'll tell you later why Kurumiya is very dangerous. Let's go first."

"Hmm, okay... Ayaka doesn't quite get it, but sure."

Kyousuke got ready for the next class and stood up. Ayaka followed reluctantly.

The second and third periods were cooking practicals, which required switching classrooms.

"Okay. Let's head out."

The home economics classroom was located on the west end of the first floor. Since Kyousuke's Year 1 Class A room was in the middle of the second floor, it was fairly far away.

"...What a drag." "Awawa."

Eiri and Maina also stood up and followed Kyousuke and Ayaka out of the classroom.

Descending the eastern staircase, they traversed the first floor to the home economics room. Possibly because they were either taking the long route or the shortcut, they did not see any classmates in front or behind them. The surroundings were very quiet.

"So this school also has cooking practicals!"

In the silence, Ayaka swung the bag carrying aprons and kerchiefs, remarking in a clear voice.

Walking along the corridor, her steps were lighter than usual.

"So happy... Fufufu. Ayaka waited so long to let Onii-chan eat Ayaka's personal cooking again! A chance for Ayaka to show off finally, are you looking forward to it?"

"Ayaka's personal cooking huh..."

Come to think of it, Kyousuke had already spent six months without eating her cooking. He could not believe he could savor the taste so soon, the taste he had almost given up on. Overcome with emotion, Kyousuke wept hot tears of joy.

"Yeah, I'm super looking forward to it. Just imagining it, my saliva is..."

"Because the food here really sucks."

"Yeah. Thinking about it makes me wanna vomit--"

"...Hmm. So, you can cook?"

Walking behind Kyousuke, Eiri joined the conversation, greatly interested.

"Of course." Ayaka turned her head and nodded.

"Because cooking, laundry and cleaning are the interests of a good wife. Are those beyond you, Dummy-Bane-san?"

"Dummy-Bane-san..."

Eiri's nickname had apparently changed from "Cutting Board."

But Eiri did not get offended.

"...Better than Maina."

"Ehhhh!?"

She nonchalantly deflected the jab towards Maina. Put on the spot, Maina jumped.

Ayaka laughed "kusukusu."

"Cun-chan is super air-headed. She'll get sugar and salt mixed up, right?"

" " "....." " "

"Oh my? Ayaka guessed right?"

In actual fact, Maina's cooking was not on the level of "mixing up sugar and salt" but had reached the stage where it was impossible to understand what had gotten mixed up.

She was probably the worst cook on the entire planet.

"By the way, Onii-chan, could it be that you've eaten Dummy-Bane-san and Cun-chan's cooking before...?"

Ayaka asked Kyousuke, prompting him to shudder at the recollection of the tragic outdoor cooking.

Looking up at Kyousuke, her sharp eyes were burning with wrath. Ayaka's voice was low and quiet.

Although he was unsure why Ayaka was angry, Kyousuke denied on the spot.

"No. I only watched them cook before."

It could be considered a stroke of luck. During the outdoor cooking, the food prepared by the two girls had been taken care of before Kyousuke began his meal. Furthermore, the cooking practicals had team assigned by seat number, which meant that Kyousuke probably had zero chance of eating Eiri and Maina's cooking in the future. To be honest, he had no wish to try either girl's cooking.

"...Yeah." Eiri turned her gaze away while Maina nodded in agreement.

"No no, I won't let Kyousuke-kun eat it! My cooking..."

Maina waved her hands frantically and bowed her head.

Perhaps feeling surprised by Maina's reaction, Ayaka tilted her head.

"Cun-chan, that's so considerate of you. You're right~ It'd be bad if Onii-chan gets sick from eating terrible cooking."

"Ahaha... If only getting sick was the worst of it."

Taking Maina's embarrassed remark as a joke, Ayaka said in an exaggerated tone of voice:

"Yeah. Mixing up sugar and salt isn't too bad, but if you confuse sugar with arsenic trioxide, or salt with strychnine, or pepper and potassium chloride, it'll be terrible~ The food you cook will kill people."

"A-Ahaha... Y-Yes."

Listening to Ayaka's joke that struck too close to home, Maina's smile twitched.

Ayaka went "...Ah!" like she noticed something.

"But Cun-chan is a murderer too, so doing that kind of thing isn't impossible, right? Something like a 'cooking murderer' who makes lethal food masquerading as food of love? So cunning. *Kusukusu*. Ayaka is sure that Cun-chan has no trouble doing that!"

"...!? Well--"

"Uwahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Just as Eiri was about to stop Maina, Maina tripped. Rather, it was what Ayaka said that unnerved Maina, causing her to take a misstep. Maina fell spectacularly, bumping into Kyousuke who was walking in front.

"Uwoah!?"

Kyousuke could not help but get swept in.

Because he had turned around reflexively, he fell down on the floor in the corridor together with Maina in a halfway posture.

"Guh!"

Suffering a heavy impact to his waist, Kyousuke groaned.

"Ahhhhh!?" Maina screamed and fell on top of him.

"Onii-chan!"

"...Are you two okay?"

Ayaka and Eiri looked in worry at Kyousuke and Maina who were entangled together.

Although Kyousuke felt a bit of pain in his left shoulder that had struck the floor, he was overall fine.

Held in Kyousuke's arms, Maina buried her face in Kyousuke's chest.

Kyousuke responded "...oh" then got up and asked Maina in concern, holding her in his arms.

"Hey, are you okay? Did you get hurt in the fall...?"

"Ah... I-I'm okay! Thanks to you, Kyousuke-kun..."

"WHAT ARE YOU DOINNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNGGG

"What are you trying to pull, Cun-chan...? Just now, you fell down on purpose right? Please don't do something like that ever again."

"Eh!? S-Sorry... But, umm, I didn't do it on purpose..."

"It must be intentional, right? Who can be stupid enough to fall over suddenly on empty ground...?"

"Hey Ayaka--"

Kyousuke hastily got up and hurried over to the two girls.

Ayaka was stil glaring at the panicking Maina, asking "what's the matter?"

Kyousuke felt troubled by Ayaka's viciousness but still tried to persuade her.

"Don't act like this! That was just an accident."

"No, this person definitely fell on purpose! Ayaka saw it. Cun-chan fell because she tripped over her own feet. That's definitely on purpose!"

Ayaka pointed at Maina and pouted.

"Ayaka, come on... You've never heard Maina's story yet?"

"...Cun-can's story?"

"The homicide case that Maina committed..."

"Ayaka doesn't know, but not interested either. Ayaka only heard that Cun-chan killed three while Dummy-Bane-san killed six. As for how they did it, Ayaka has no idea, but it's pretty much stabbing with something sharp or strangling with a rope, right? There's totally no need to listen--"

"It's clumsiness and cooking."

"...Huh?"

"Maina committed homicide through clumsiness and cooking."

"H-How..."

"I'll explain, Ayaka-chan."

Maina got up and began to narrate, looking at Ayaka's puzzled expression.

She told Ayaka about how her excessive clumsiness killed people, how her cooking took a person's life, how she had meant no harm and did not commit blunders on purpose, how she had not explained all this because she was afraid it might create distance between them...

"Sorry." Maina bowed her head in apology at the end.

"Oh, Ayaka sees now."

Ayaka nodded.

"Please stay away from Onii-chan from now on."

She spoke while smiling.

"------"

Maina was rendered speechless. Ayaka wiped her smile away and said:

"Because you're too dangerous! With you hanging around, who knows when he'll be killed inexplicably by your clumsiness... Even though cooking is fine as long as no one eats it. But if he gets caught up suddenly in your accidents like just now, what then? If you can't do anything about yourself, don't make trouble for others. From now on, stay at least two meters away from Onii-chan! Got that, Cun-chan?"

"No."

".....Huh?"

Maina's forceful voice rebuked Ayaka.

Perhaps surprised by the unexpected opposition, Ayaka was stunned.

Changing her timid attitude, Maina gazed at Ayaka with eyes filled with determination.

"Sorry, Ayaka-chan. I can't agree to your demands. If Ayaka-chan doesn't want me around... I'll be sad but I will take care to stay away from you, Ayaka-chan. But Kyousuke-kun told me not to worry! No matter how air-headed, how useless, how much trouble I cause others, it's fine... He's willing to be with me! So sorry, I won't leave Kyousuke-kun's side."

"Wha..."

Ayaka widened her eyes and stumbled.

Opening and closing her mouth for a while, her body began to shake from anger.

"Y-You... How dare you say something so impudent--"

"Sorry, Ayaka. It's just as Maina said."

"......O-Onii-chan?"

Unable to sustain even an angry voice, Ayaka stared at Kyousuke in shock.

Kyousuke lowered his gaze to escape eye contact with Ayaka, then searched for words:

"I know about Maina's clumsiness and understand very well the disasters caused by that clumsiness. But Maina is a very kind girl, very honest and trying very hard, so... Even if it's a little dangerous, I don't want to abandon her."

"Kyousuke-kun..."

"------"

Light vanished from Ayaka's irises.

Looking down, Kyousuke did not notice the change in his sister.

Carelessly, he tried to persuade Ayaka.

"Also, Maina's clumsiness doesn't just explode indiscriminately regardless of time and location. As long as we pay extra attention, living normally is possible. Because causing death through Maina's clumsiness only happened once in the beginning... It's nowhere as dangerous as it sounds, okay?"

Kyousuke looked up to sneak a glance at Ayaka's reaction.

"------"

This time, it was Ayaka's turn to hang her head, hiding her expression.

Her bangs, dangling helplessly, cast shadows over Ayaka's eyes.

"Even so, there's no need to worry about danger. No matter what kind of clumsy storm Maina starts, I'll protect you, Ayaka! Believe me, Ayaka, so please get along with Maina? Your age is very close to Maina's so I think you two can become great friends."

"------"

"A-Ayaka?"

Just as Kyousuke reached out towards his motionless sister...

"...Is... that... so?"

Whispering in fragments, Ayaka asked.

"Huh? Sorry, you're speaking too softly--"

"So you really care that much about this girl!?"

In a loud voice that shook the entire corridor, Ayaka roared hysterically. Glaring at Kyousuke, she pointed at Maina.

"------"

Kyousuke did not know if Ayaka intended to say more, but she had her lips pursed tightly.

Kyousuke was stunned by the excessively intense roar. His heart gradually calmed down.

Blocking Ayaka's harsh gaze, he took a deep breath.

"Yes, I care very much. Maina is my important friend."

"......!?"

The instant he answered, Ayaka's dormant eyes of pitch-blackness wavered.

As though affected by rippling on a water's surface, her shoulders, fists and then her entire body began to shake.

"Oh, Ayaka sees... Ayaka sees now. Compared to Ayaka, Onii-chan cares more about friends... Yes, Ayaka understands. Ayaka understands very well, Onii-chan..."

Her clenched fists relaxing, she looked like all power was drained from her body.

Her stiff face relaxed to show a radiant smile.

"So Onii-chan, just do what you like, okay?"

As soon as she spoke, she walked ahead by herself.

"......Huh?"

Unable to move, Kyousuke could only watch as the image of Ayaka's back gradually receded into the distance.

Ayaka's pace was very calm, but her intense anger was easily seen.

Kyousuke was at a total loss when he felt a light tap on his back.

"...Don't worry."

Passing by him and leaving just a brief message, Eiri chased after Ayaka.

Kyousuke did not react. Maina carefully took his hand.

"Kyousuke-kun, let's go, okay? We'll be late for class."

"Hmm? Oh..."

Finally coming back to his senses, Kyousuke listened to Maina and began to walk. His limbs felt as though they did not belong to him, completely powerless, like his soul was sucked out of his body.

Ayaka's words kept echoing in his mind.

The shock caused Kyousuke to abandon all thought processes while he walked absentmindedly.

Even so--

"Sorry... But thanks."

Maina's embarrassed but joyful voice produced warmth in Kyousuke's heart.

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"E-Excuse me... Ayaka-san?"

"------"

Kyousuke timidly tried to speak to Ayaka but was ignored.

Keeping her gaze firmly near her hands, Ayaka chopped with the kitchen knife in a steady rhythm.

Her face was pouting to an exaggerated degree, as though it would pop with a single poke.

The chives on the cutting board were chopped into extremely fine powder.

"U-Umm..."

"Ayaka-chan, the potatoes are peeled!"

Just as Kyousuke was left hanging awkwardly, a boy in the class called out.

Instantly, a smile bloomed on Ayaka's face while she answered cordially:

"Oh okay! Thank you very much! Just soak them in water first, okay?"

"Yes sir!" The boy saluted then did as Ayaka ordered, moving briskly.

Finished with chopping the chives, Ayaka picked up an onion, still with a smile on her face.

Kyousuke did not let go of this chance and spoke cheerfully to Ayaka:

"Hey Ayaka! Let me help too?"

"------"

Ignored. The smile instantly vanished from Ayaka's face while she was cutting vegetables.

Kyousuke did not give up and continued trying to converse:

"Hey hey. Anything's fine, 'kay? As long it's within my ability, I'll do anything!"

".....way.....aside..."

Ayaka's hand suddenly stopped.

Seeing Ayaka reacting to him, Kyousuke exclaimed happily:

"Eh? What did you say!? As long as it's your request, Ayaka, I'll do anything, no matter what--"

"Onii-chan, you're in the way, can you move aside!?"

"...Got it."

Pointed at by a sharp-tipped, thick-bladed kitchen knife, Kyousuke left the counter.

Standing frozen by the window, Kyousuke felt like a withered vegetable while he swept his gaze across the classroom.

Dressed in kerchiefs and aprons, the students were divided into groups of four, cooperating harmoniously to prepare for the cooking practical.

Kurumiya was dressed in cooking clothes like a middle-aged lady, strolling between the counters, patrolling and monitoring the students' situations. Carried on her shoulder was a massive ladle to replace the usual pipe of steel.

"Do your best, kukuku... This is an excellent chance for you to eat a proper meal, you know?"

Raising the giant ladle to deliver a fierce blow to a boy who was secretly trying to steal a kitchen knife, she disciplined him while smiling. On the silver stand in the front of the classroom, there was a wide assortment of ingredients provided.

Onions, carrots, potatoes, cabbage, lettuce, Chinese cabbage, spinach, tomatoes, bell peppers, pumpkins, mushrooms, pork, chicken, beef, bacon, eggs.. etc.

Many of them were in terrible condition, with some mixed among them that were virtually rotten.

Choosing ingredients correctly then cooking according to reference books, each team was allowed to cook freely--This was how "cooking practicals" were conducted at the Purgatorium School of Rehabilitation.

Under Ayaka's direction, Kyousuke's group was earnestly busying themselves for the cooking.

Thirty minutes after second period started, the groups were all at different stages of progress. Some had not even started cooking. For example--

"Please! I'm begging you, Eiri-san. We wish to try your cooking no matter what. Honest to God! We're very sincere!"

"Hee, heeheehee... Kneeling down to enjoy the view of panties, panties... Hee, heehee--Gyah!?"

"...Huh? You bunch of kitchen trash, always making trouble for us, and now you're begging me with ulterior motives?"

"Awawa. E-Eiri-chan... Just let them go... Auau."

Dreadlocks guy and the hunchback were prostrated on the ground with their heads bowed. Eiri looked at Oonogi in derision while stepping on Usami, answering "...Hmph."

Pulling at the hem of Eiri's skirt, Maina was in a state of panic.

"Motherfucker!? You sly little punk! I wanna get stepped on by Eiri-san too--Guhaa!?"

"Y-You pervert... Shut the hell up!"

Blushing red, Eiri stepped on Oonogi's face.

Despite resisting with a twisted face, Oonogi was grinning lecherously.

"Gyahhhh!? D-Don't--Ahhh, don't stop... D-DON'T!?"

"Awawa. Don't do that, Eiri-chan! These guys are perverts who'll never learn! Just ignore them and get back to cooking..."

"Argh, I can't stand this, I know! I'll do the cooking, okay!?"

" "YAHOO!!!!" "

"Just go die already."

Seeing Oonogi and Usami clapping their hands, overjoyed, Eiri put on an apron.

Maina stuck to observing and did not interfere in the cooking.

"Those guys seem so happy... I'm so jealous."

Having mixed feelings, Kyousuke watched Oonogi and Usami jumping around the countertop.

Those two guys probably had no idea.

--What Eiri's cooking (laugh) was actually like.

"Okay okay, all that's left to do is letting it cook fully, right?"

At this moment, the fragrance of soy sauce and sweet wine could be smelled nearby.

Standing next to the bubbling and boiling pot, Ayaka took a breather.

Ayaka was quite fast, almost about to finish one dish, immersed in fiddling with something in her hand.

Then Ayaka handed the ladle over to the boy on the side who was watching the pot.

"Okay, Kitou-kun, watch the pot and don't let the bottom stick, okay? Kousaka-kun, use the peeler to peel more vegetables. Since this is a rare chance, let's make use of the time to make all kinds of things!"

Giving orders to another boy, she then raised her fist high and hollered.

" "Yeah!" " Answering vigorously, the boys showed glimmering gazes as they went to work.

If possible, Kyousuke wanted to join them too, but...

"--Ayaka said already, move aside, Onii-chan, okay?"

While he was lost in his thoughts, a cold voice and gaze was cast towards him.

Chopping down, the kitchen knife decapitated the mackerel in one clean blow.

".....Got it."

Kyousuke helplessly left the counter.

Ayaka seemed quite miffed about Kyousuke helping Maina.

This was Kyousuke's first time seeing Ayaka act so cold. Unsure how to respond, he could only wallow in his misery alone.

"Kyousuke-kun, umm... A-Are you okay?"

Squatting in a corner of the room, Kyousuke heard someone speak to him.

He looked up to see Maina looking at him in worry.

Maina knelt down on the spot.

"It's all my fault... Sorry. I made Ayaka-chan so angry--"

"Don't feel guilty."

Kyousuke placed his hand on Maina's lowered head and said:

"You did nothing wrong, Maina. I think... Ayaka was at fault there. No, it was my fault, right? Yeah, it's my fault. I said something I shouldn't have. That's why Ayaka--"

"It's not your fault, Kyousuke-kun!"

Maina vigorously disagreed with the depressed Kyousuke.

But she immediately returned to her usual timid tone and continued:

"It's not your fault, Kyousuke-kun... It's not Ayaka-chan's fault either. No one wants the people they hold dear to be in danger, so... I think it's impossible to accomplish straight away after all, so some time is needed. I'm very stupid and dangerous too. I know very well that it's hard for others to accept who I am."

--However. Maina poured strength into her voice.

Using those large, flaxen-colored eyes, she looked at Kyousuke squarely:

"Exactly because of that, I won't give up. Until I earn Ayaka-chan's trust, I will keep working hard! The road ahead might be long and she probably won't trust me to the point of accepting my clumsiness completely... That's what I think. But still, I have to get along with her first! Once we get along, then I can earn her trust. I'll make her feel the same way about me as how she feels about you, Kyousuke-kun!"

"Maina..."

Hearing Maina, Kyousuke decided perhaps she was right.

No matter how much a person repeated "believe me", it would still be hard to trust them. This was even more true for special cases like Maina.

"Okay... I see now. Maybe I was too impatient."

"Yes. After a while, I'll go over to apologize. Let's make up with her?"

"...Yeah. Thanks, Maina. Thanks to you, I feel better now."

Smiling, Kyousuke stroked Maina's head.

Feeling ticklish, Maina smiled, staying still for Kyousuke to caress her.

"------"

At the counter, Ayaka was staring at Kyousuke and Maina.

In the middle of digging the mackerel's innards out, her hands stopped. Her eyes became as murky as a fish's.

However, Kyousuke and Maina did not notice Ayaka's appearance.

Carelessly, they were talking and smiling side by side.

"......That girl."

Ayaka gnashed her teeth loudly.

Slicing into the fish's belly, the tip of the knife emerged from the mackerel's back.

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"Wowwwwww... Ayaka, you made all this?"

Looking at all the food packed on the table, Kyousuke exclaimed in amazement.

Meat and potato stew, boiled mackerel with miso, deep-fried chicken, fried egg, boiled spinach, miso soup.

Variously garnished with shredded spring onion, enhanced with powdered ginger or served with turnip beneath, every dish was full-sized with excellent presentation and aroma.

Furthermore, Kyousuke knew very well that Ayaka's cooking tasted as good as it looked.

Gulping could be heard from his throat--However.

"Excuse me... Ayaka-san? Where's my portion?"

Placed in front of Kyousuke was just a cup of tap water.

Before Ayaka next to him and the boys on the other side was rice and miso soup with a small dish each for portioning out the food. Not even chopsticks were set before Kyousuke.

Ayaka smiled cheerfully as Kyousuke asked in trepidation.

"How could there possibly be any for you?"

She replied firmly.

"......What the heck."

"Yes. Because Onii-chan didn't help out. No working, no eating."

"No wait, you're the one who told me to 'move aside', that's why I--"

"Did Ayaka say that?"

"...Hey."

"Can't remember."

"....."

Ayaka glared sideways at Kyousuke then said sarcastically in nonchalance.

"Basically, Onii-chan is reaping what he sows, right? Not only putting in no work, you were flirting with another girl in the class! Ayaka has no food for someone so bad. Bad people need to be punished with hunger. Please reflect~~ carefully."

"What flirting... We were just talking about you."

--Later...

During the lunch break, Kyousuke immediately went before Ayaka to apologize.

Even though Maina was also apologizing with her head bowed, Ayaka's reaction was:

'Can people who cause trouble in addition to being incapable of cooking, please get out of the way? Since you're both useless, why don't you flaunt your affection publicly and whisper sweet nothings to each other!? Stop entering Ayaka's sight!'

'.....'

Kyousuke and Maina had no choice but to retreat and strategize again in a corner of the classroom.

They reached a conclusion that it would be best to wait for Ayaka to cool off first.

Looking back at an opportune moment, Kyousuke saw that his group still had not started eating.

"...Oh, sorry! The food is getting cold even though we put so much effort in making it. My useless Onii-chan sure knows how to cause trouble. Okay, please fill your stomachs as much as you can!"

Ignoring the depressed Kyousuke, Ayaka clapped her hands in delight.

" "Wonderful!!!" " The two boys answered, picking up their chopsticks in delight. " "Thanks for the food!" " Clapping their hands together, they then used chopsticks to pick up pieces of meat and potato stew and deep-fried chicken.

" "Pfffffffffffffffft!?" "

At this moment, the sound of people spewing stuff from their mouths could be heard suddenly.

Everyone looked over with curiosity to find Oonogi and Usami choking on the table on the side.

Sitting opposite them, Maina jumped with an "Eeek!?" to evade the attack of spurting rice.

Oonogi and Usami were in pain, unable to breathe.

"W-What the fuck is this!? So hard... So fucking hard... Totally motherfucking uncooked... And so ugly--It's rotten!? These ingredients are fucking rotten!"

"Hee, heehee... Sweet and salty, bitter and sour... The condiments are a total mess, the ingredients are a total mess, a disaster in taste~ Hee, heehee... Urghhhhhh!!!"

"------"

Vomited all over, Eiri was glaring silently at the two of them.

In the center of the table was a dish served on a large plate. It was piled so high up that it looked like it was going to topple over any moment.

This was probably the result of shoving all sorts of ingredients into the pot as convenient, then cooking them sloppily. The tragic remains of the various ingredients resembled a mountain of corpses.

Creating a scene of tragedy once again, Eiri had veins bulging on her forehead.

"Y-You two... Saying something about 'wanting to eat my cooking no matter what' and now you react like this? Want to die? Just go die already."

"Awawa. Your beautiful face is soiled... Auau."

Maina took out her pink handkerchief and helped wipe off the stuff spewed over Eiri's face.

Finally recovering, Oonogi and Usami looked for excuses.

"B-But... I never expected Eiri-san's cooking(?) to be so fucking terrifying. Totally failing in feminine power. I've never eaten anything more disgusting in my entire life."

"Hee, heehee... Rather than cooking, it's a pile of trash. Not even close to leftovers... Heeheehee."

"Wha--"

Eiri was speechless, flushed red in the face.

"Shut up, you two! That's going too far! No matter what, it can't taste that bad! It's not like I put anything weird in there, how can this be possible!?"

Eiri angrily picked up her chopsticks and tried a mouthful of her own cooking.

"------"

After freezing for a brief instant, she swallowed after almost no chewing.

"See, it's pretty terrible... n-no, good... Isn't... it?"

Large beads of sweat were appearing on her twitching, smiling face.

"NO NO NO NO NO NO!" Oonogi retorted.

"You're totally forcing yourself! Your fucking face is green!"

"...H-Huh? Of course it's not green. I feel terrible... n-no, normal."

"Really? Then how about you finish the rest, Eiri-san--"

"...Whew. So full now."

"All you had was one fucking mouthful, okay!? How small is your stomach!?"

"Umm, well. I don't have any appetite, so..."

"Hey. Don't you dare run away just when things look bad, clumsy girl."

"Hee, heeheehee... S-Stomach ache... Going to toilet."

"You're not getting away either, motherfucking Usami! How am I gonna finish all this crap by myself!?"

"By the way, anyone who leaves food behind will be disciplined. You made it, you eat it. Not a single scrap goes to waste."

"Geh!? K-Kurumiya-sensei... But Eiri-san is the one who made this--"

"...Huh? You two asked her to, didn't you? Eat it all up and don't make a fuss."

"B-But--"

"EAT. IT. ALL."

" ".....Yes ma'am." "

Pierced by the murderous eyes, Oonogi and Usami clutched their chopsticks. With sweat, tears and snot flowing, they began to eat in suffering. In stark contrast to this scene from hell...

" "S-So tasty!!!!" "

Shoving Ayaka's cooking into their mouths, the boys were exclaiming emotionally.

"This stewed meat, the flavor has gone all the way inside... Soaked in soup, the vegetables and meat melt in your mouth! This taste has surpassed mom's taste, it's a hotel's taste? I-I'm so touched..."

"So hot! The meat juices spill out as soon as I bite it... The outside is crunchy but the inside is juicy. The meat's essence is sealed completely inside! This fried chicken is superb even if you just consider the outer layer!"

Ayaka puffed out her chest at the boys who kept offering praise.

"That's because the meat and potato stew was served after the juices had come out. The fried chicken was fried just a moment before serving onto the plate! By adding a special sauce to substitute for lemon, turning it into Chinese-style fried chicken."

"Wowwwwww, so amazing! Ayaka-chan is amazing!"

"You're taking number one spot on my list of girls I wanna marry! Marry me!"

"...HUH!? Who the fuck is going to marry you, bastard? Imma gonna slaughter you!"

"Okay okay." Ayaka tried to smooth things over by restraining Kyousuke who had stood up and kicked his chair over.

"Onii-chan, you should drink water, okay? ...Oh, Kitou-kun! Would you like seconds? Kousaka-kun, please eat some more!"

" "Yes~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~!" "

The boys raised their hands after hearing Ayaka.

Sentenced to "hunger punishment", Kyousuke could only suck his finger while watching them eat, sobbing all by himself. Having looked forward to this so much before class, he was now confronted with Ayaka's utterly cold attitude.

"Wah!? Onii-chan, why are you crying?"

"Sob sob... Because, Ayaka... Ayaka... Sniff."

Kyousuke could not help but cry.

Ayaka was so surprised that she jumped while the boys at the table stopped eating. The students in the class all focused their gaze in Kyousuke's direction while chattering among themselves.

"Wow... Hurry and look, that Kamiya is really crying! Even a mass murderer's eyes are able to shed tears..."

"What what, a fight between siblings? And Kyousuke-kun lost tragically!"

"Other people's misery is the best side dish. I can eat another bowl! What lovely rice, mmm-hmm."

"Awawa. K-Kyousuke-kun..."

"...Just let him be. We're going to the snack shop."

Throwing a glance at Kyousuke, Eiri and Maina left the classroom.

"Onii-chan..." Ayaka was shocked, her voice showing pity.

But immediately, she shook her head and went "No no no!"

"No food for Onii-chan! Onii-chan must reflect... Ayaka can't spoil Onii-chan! Because Onii-chan's behavior is unforgivable!"

"Sob sob sob sob. Ayaka..."

"No, don't make eyes like a chihuahua!"

Ayaka turned her head away to avoid Kyousuke's pitiful eyes.

Ayaka continued to eat, choosing resolute determination to deeply convey the message that she "would not listen no matter what Onii-chan says." Perhaps because Kyousuke looked too depressed, the other two boys in the group ate noisily without saying a word, causing the atmosphere to become heavy. The lovely taste of the food was being wasted.

--Until a short while later.

Understanding that he was only getting in the way, Kyousuke silently stood up, preparing to get food from either the snack shop or the cafeteria to serve as lunch.

"......Hmm."

Ayaka reacted but did not stop him.

"Yahoo, everyone! I'm here to play. Did you cook anything delicious?"

At this moment, a friendly voice came from the door.

A girl in a black gas mask was waving her hand energetically.

× × ×

"Renko..."

"Foosh. What's up, Kyousuke? You're looking like you're dying today. Did you eat something terrible--Uwahhhhhhhhhhhhh!?"

Walking up to Kyousuke's group's table, Renko instantly reeled back and exclaimed in surprise:

"W-W-W-W-What's with this whole table of luxurious cooking!? Who on earth--"

"Ayaka made it."

Ayaka answered coldly and sipped a mouthful of miso soup.

"What did you say!?" Renko became even more shocked.

"You made all the food on this table by yourself, Ayaka-chan!?"

"Yes. But Kitou-kun and Kousaka-kun also helped."

"Kitou-kun and Kousaka-kun... Who the heck?"

" "It's us, GMK!" "

Instantly, the boys put down their chopsticks and stood up together.

Standing with their backs very straight, they were blushing slightly in the face.

"Oh." Renko sent one fist into her other palm, remembering.

"Aren't you the lovely gentlemen who helped light the fire during the outdoor cooking?"

" "...Eh? Oh... R-Right!" "

The boys were overjoyed to know that GMK--Renko--remembered them. Exchanging glances with each other, they bowed vigorously.

"...GMK?" Ayaka frowned.

"It's the stage name I use for my FUCKIN PARK gig. GMK is short for 'GasMasK', see?"

"Heh~ So you really are an artiste."

More accurately, a music artiste rather than a comedian artiste but Renko nodded, not getting hung up on that point.

"Yes. If a chance comes along, Ayaka-chan, let me show you my live stage performance! It's not a joke, a live show for real... Foosh. Well, putting that aside first--"

The eyepieces glinted momentarily then Renko shifted her gaze over the abundance of food on the table.

"So amazing... They all look very delicious! I almost thought I'd walked into a three-star hotel somewhere. Making this kind of food out of those ingredients that are like organic trash... Are you a genius? It's almost like magic! Your feminine power is shooting through the roof!"

"...Hmm." Hearing Renko's innocent praises, Ayaka froze.

Her clear expression broke down, the corners of her lips twisting downwards in a frown, turning into a negative expression.

"I-It's nothing significant. Please cut the obvious flattery."

"It's not flattery! If circumstances permit, I'd really love to take off my mask to try your cooking... But I can still drink miso soup, may I try some? Here, use this straw, slurp slurp."

"No."

"What's wrong with that~? Just the meat and potato stew's broth, the fried chicken's sauce, the soup base for the fried egg and turnip will be fine! I really wanna try your cooking, Ayaka-chwa~n!"

"You... Argh, can't stand it, please don't press so close!"

Ayaka struggled out of Renko's embrace that came from behind, glaring at the gas mask.

"Stingy." Renko grumbled with a finger on her ventilator.

"Not stingy. This food wasn't cooked for you."

"Really? Then for whom?"

"Hmm. W-Well..."

Ayaka fell silent at Renko's question. Her gaze wandered in midair.

"Kitou-kun and Kousaka-kun--"

"Yes, I know. You made it for Kyousuke, right?"

"......!?"

Ayaka's body suddenly shook.

"Foosh." Renko smiled and said matter-of-factly:

"Otherwise, you won't cook up such a feast, right? Although I already know you love Kyousuke very much, after seeing this table of food, I believe it even stronger. Quantity goes without saying, but you clearly put in lots of effort for every dish. The feelings for the person whom you're dedicating this table of food are clearly conveyed."

"------"

Ayaka bit her lip hard in response to what Renko pointed out.

But at this time, Renko cocked her head as though she finally noticed.

"...But what's this? Your precious older brother isn't eating!? So mean, Kyousuke! I can't believe you're not even touching your chopsticks when Ayaka-chan made this rare feast!"

"No, I really wanted to eat a long time ago, but... Ayaka won't let me."

"W-W-W-W-W-What did you say!!?"

Roaring with arms akimbo, Renko acted in quite an exaggerated manner.

She stared at Ayaka's lowered face.

"Why, Ayaka-chan!? Aren't you and Kyousuke--"

"This is punishment by hunger."

"...Hmm?"

"Onii-chan angered Ayaka, so Ayaka forbids Onii-chan from eating! This has nothing to do with you, Mask, could you move aside!?"

Renko had failed to catch onto the situation. Ayaka roared violently at her.

But Renko was not intimidated.

"Oh I see. In other words, you siblings are fighting?"

"...Yes. This is Onii-chan's punishment, for teaching him! To make Onii-chan reflect properly, Ayaka needs to be strict--"

"What a waste."

"...What?"

"What a waste, Ayaka-chan. You're a brocon and Kyousuke's also a siscon. You want to let Kyousuke eat your cooking and Kyousuke also wants to eat your cooking. Despite your mutual feelings... You're letting go of this rare chance for something so trivial, what a waste!"

"Trivial..."

"Yes, it's trivial. Listen carefully, Ayaka-chan. The cooking practical only happens once every two months. I don't know why you're angry, but if you forbid Kyousuke from eating your cooking like this, Kyousuke won't be able to eat your cooking at all... And that would be a total shame! It'll be too late after you make up, you know?"

"....."

"Most importantly, the ingredients will be wasted. It's not every day when you can pour your thoughts and feelings into cooking, if you don't let the person who you're dedicating the food to eat it, that'll be totally sad. When feelings fail to be conveyed, it's so sad..."

Renko hung her head sadly.

--For Renko who was currently suffering from the pain of unrequited love, seeing Ayaka preventing feelings that were supposed to be conveyed from reaching the target must be unbearable.

"Mask?" Ayaka gazed at Renko's rare moment of melancholy.

For a moment, silence descended.

"......Sigh."

Sighing, Ayaka got up from the table. Passing by Renko who looked up with an "...Oya?", she walked over to the utensils cabinet--

"Okay, Onii-chan."

She took out a serving dish and a set of chopsticks, placing them at Kyousuke's position.

"...Eh?"

Ignoring Kyousuke's surprise, Ayaka left the table again.

Soon, she returned from the counter, bringing a bowl filled with rice and a wooden bowl filled with miso soup and a rich assortment of soup ingredients.

Setting down the two bowls before Kyousuke, Ayaka sat down.

"How much longer are you going to stand there stupidly? Hurry up, sit down and eat."

"...I'm allowed?"

"Why else would Ayaka bring them over?"

"Seriously!? Th-Thank you--"

"However." Ayaka extended an index finger to stop his lips while he was thanking.

She delivered a piercing gaze and a strict voice.

"Ayaka is still angry but Ayaka just doesn't want to waste the chance for Onii-chan to eat Ayaka's cooking, that's all! Don't get the wrong idea, okay?"

"......Roger that."

"Yes. Then eat."

"Thanks for the food!"

Kyousuke clapped his hands together then picked up the chopsticks to begin eating lunch.

First he sipped a mouthful of miso soup, allowing the miso flavoring to spread richly inside his mouth.

Swallowing it, the broth's fragrance immediately rushed out of his nostrils.

--So nostalgic.

For Kyousuke, this was the taste of normal everyday life that he had lost.

A warm feeling different from the food's heat was spreading throughout his body.

Once he started moving his chopsticks, Kyousuke could not stop at all, eating his meal in total immersion.

Meat and potato stew, miso-boiled mackerel, deep-fried chicken, fried egg, boiled spinach, even the texture of the rice felt so nostalgic. Soon after, his rice bowl was emptied.

Without waiting for Kyousuke to ask, Ayaka refilled it for him.

"Here." She handed the bowl packed full of rice to Kyousuke, who went "thank you" and received it, continuing to eat.

Seeing the food on the plates gradually disappearing, Ayaka watched over Kyousuke with a smile. Renko and the boys on the opposite side also watched Kyousuke eat without saying anything.

"I'm full!"

Spending roughly twenty minutes to eliminate all the food, Kyousuke clapped his hands together and put down his chopsticks.

Ayaka poured barley tea into Kyousuke's cup while he rubbed his belly in satisfaction, asking:

"...How was it?"

"Too delicious!"

"Really...? Ehehe."

Hearing Kyousuke's comment, Ayaka revealed a smile.

With joy and relief mixed in this expression, there were no signs of anger remaining.

While Kyousuke was drinking ice-cold tea after the meal, basking in the afterglow of bliss...

"Oh my~ I'm so happy to be alive... I almost thought I'd die from the food being too delicious."

"*Kusukusu*. Onii-chan is making too big a deal out of it. But Ayaka feels glad too."

"...Foosh."

Staring at the siblings who were smiling at each other lovingly, Renko breathed out contentedly.

"Thank you, Renko. It's thanks to your way with words that Ayaka allowed me to eat. I'm so grateful that I don't know how to thank you..."

"Well, just thank me with your body?"

"Eh."

"Foosh. Just kidding. No need to thank me, Kyousuke. You were really so happy while you were eating. Seeing you like that makes me satisfied. Also, Ayaka-chan was so happy too! As an observer, it made me feel all warm and fuzzy inside too."

"Renko..."

" "GMK..." "

"------"

Ayaka did not respond to Renko but turned to one side.

"Shuko..." Renko sighed and said with regret:

"But in the end, I still didn't get to eat Ayaka-chan's cooking. I really wanna try but this can't be helped. After all, the food was cooked for Kyousuke. Next time--
"

"Hmm!"

"...Hmm?"

Ayaka presented a teacup towards the depressed Renko.

Renko cocked her head, Ayaka pushed the teacup forward again.

"Hmm!"

"...Hmm?"

"Stop going 'Hmm?'!"

Ayaka yelled impatiently, pushing the teacup into Renko's hand, forcing her to hold it. Then Ayaka poured tea into the cup with annoyance.

"Eh?" Renko felt puzzled.

"...Ayaka-chan? This, umm--"

"For you."

Finishing pouring the tea, Ayaka turned her face away decisively and said gruffly:

"Ayaka can't let you eat her cooking, but Ayaka can let you try the tea she brewed. Even with a mask, you can drink, right? Please drink with gratitude."

"A-Ayaka-chan...!"

Emotionally, Renko hastily prepared her straw and connected it to the inside of her mask, then dipping on end into the cup. She started to slurp.

"So tasty! This tea is amazing! Slurp slurp."

"...Thanks for the praise. It's just barley tea."

"Another cup please!"

"No. Just one cup."

"Shuko..."

"*Kusukusu*."

With the empty cup snatched away, Renko's hopes were dashed.

Ayaka laughed while refilling her own cup.

Watching Ayaka and Renko interact harmoniously, Kyousuke felt his face relax naturally. Although it was happening very slowly, at least he could feel that the two girls were definitely growing closer to each other.

At this rate, perhaps Ayaka would be able to build close relations with the others.

× × ×

"No."

Ayaka refused resolutely, pouting.

During the break after washing up the dishes, while the other groups were still not done yet, Kyousuke brought Maina to see Ayaka, hoping to make up, but Ayaka refused harshly.

"Don't be like that. Just get along as friends. --Will you?"

"No. No no no no, absolutely no! No means no, no!"

Ayaka shook her head intensely, causing Maina to get tearful.

"...Sigh." Eiri rubbed the center of her forehead while Renko scratched her head, going "oh my oh my."

"Why do you hate me so much..."

"Because Cun-chan is always so cunning."

"Cunning... How?"

"...Your existence itself."

Ayaka pouted at the helpless Kyousuke.

"Seriously, Onii-chan, why do you keep protecting Cun-chan? Are you a pusher of Cun-chan?"

"...What do you mean by pusher?"

"Basically it means like. Hey Onii-chan--"

Ayaka suddenly got up and stood in front of Kyousuke.

She looked at Maina, Eiri and Renko in turn then asked:

"Among all these people, Onii-chan, who do you like best?"

" " "......!?" " "

The reactions were fully dramatic. Maina jumped, going "Ehhhhh!?" Eiri went red in the face, going "Wha..." Renko leaned her upper body backwards, going "L-Like best!?"

Kyousuke stared with his mouth open, looking into Ayaka's eyes.

"Hey hey hey. Why are you suddenly asking that?"

"*Kusukusu*. Just a little curious. Everyone is curious, right?"

Ayaka smiled and asked the other girls.

"Awawa. I... Although I'm a bit curious, I'm also a bit afraid... Auau."

"...Whatever. Like this kind of stuff matters. There's nothing to be curious about. Stupid much?"

"Curious, curious, super curious! Kyousuke, it's surely me, right!?"

Maina's gaze began to wander. Eiri played with the tips of her hair. Renko leaned against him.

Kyousuke broke out in cold sweat on his forehead.

"W-Well..."

"Okay, answer honestly. Who is it? Who do you like best, Onii-chan?"

"Well... Well..."

" " "....." " "

With all gazes gathered upon him, Kyousuke gulped.

Closing his eyes to keep calm, he took a deep breath and said:

"I-I like everyone!"

" " "------" " "

The instant he yelled as loud as he could, time froze.

Light disappeared from Maina and Eiri's eyes. The gas mask fell silent too.

"Huh?" Kyousuke felt puzzled and repeated himself.

"Did you catch that? I said I liked everyone..."

"......Three."

Renko mumbled quietly. Her voice was very muffled and hard to hear clearly.

"Huh?"

"Three-timing! Everyone... I can't believe you said everyone!!!? Jerk!!! Jerkish jerk of a jerk, Kyousuke is a total jerk!!!"

Renko yelled and hammered him randomly.

"Ehhh?" Kyousuke opened his eyes wide to see Eiri's cold gaze piercing him.

"...Absolute worst. I'm such a retard for holding hopes for a lustful pervert like you."

"K-Kyousuke-kun... Japan doesn't allow polygamy, you know?"

Even Maina was gazing with reprimanding eyes.

"Umm... Wait wait, you've gotten the wrong idea! That's not what I mean by everyone. You've misunderstood the meaning of 'like'. To me, all three of you are my important friends, so I can't rank you! That's why--"

"Then what if you include Ayaka?"

Ayaka, who had been silent, asked slowly.

She looked up and gazed at Kyousuke's face with a very serious expression.

"Cun-chan, Dummy-Bane-san and Mask, plus Ayaka. Out of all four, who do you like best, Onii-chan?"

"......Hmm."

Faced with this question, Kyousuke could not answer.

In his heart, Ayaka was the most important person in the world. This was unquestionable.

But it was definitely not right to talk about "liking" Ayaka on the same standards as Renko and the others. Renko, Eiri and Maina were also his important friends. As much as possible, Kyousuke did not want to hurt anyone.

Stuck on how he should answer, in the end, Kyousuke went:

"I-I like everyone!"

" " " "------" " " "

The instant he made his decision to answer, time froze again.

Light disappeared from Ayaka's eyes while Eiri face palmed, going "...Idiot."

"Oh, no..." Kyousuke frantically added an explanation.

"I like Ayaka, it's true! I love Ayaka the most in the whole wide world! But I don't want to compare my love for Ayaka with that for the others... Rather, I don't

want to have winners and losers? Like absolute ratings rather than relative ratings? Like this--"

"Yes. Ayaka understands very clearly, Onii-chan."

"Oh, you really do!?"

"Yes. Onii-chan wants to anger Ayaka. Ayaka understands very~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ clearly. Ayaka should have known, sure enough, Onii-chan shouldn't be allowed to eat."

"......Eh?"

Ayaka hung her head and clenched her fist.

Kyousuke was just about to look at his sister's face when...

"--Vomit it out, okay?"

While Kyousuke was bending forward, Ayaka swung her fist.

A completely merciless body blow.

"Guhu!?" Struck at extremely close range by a full powered and sudden attack, Kyousuke collapsed on the ground.

"Kyousuke-kun!?" "Kyousuke!" "Ayaka-chan!?"

Maina and the others screamed. Kyousuke felt an intense urge to vomit, rising from his full stomach. Doubled over in pain, Kyousuke heard an extremely cold voice coming down from above.

"Vomit it out, Onii-chan. Since you didn't reflect at all, you want Ayaka to confiscate totally... Ayaka's cooking that Onii-chan ate, right?"

"Aya... ka...?"

A voice and expression that Kyousuke had never experienced before. Most terrifying of all, the shock of Ayaka attacking him for the first time was hitting Kyousuke a hundred times stronger than the force of her fist.

--Why? Why?

Ayaka's dark eyes were looking down at Kyousuke who was looking up at her while forgetting even his pain.

"Ayaka clearly loves Onii-chan the most, so why won't Onii-chan tell Ayaka that you love Ayaka the most? In Onii-chan's heart, Ayaka is only this insignificant?"

"....."

"Hey, why won't you answer, why won't you answer, why won't you answer? No answering... means that, right? If that's what you mean, yes... Vomit it out. Vomit it out for Ayaka. Then reflect carefully--"

"Stop it!"

Ayaka raised her right foot, preparing to kick Kyousuke's belly.

Renko slid between the two of them and pulled Ayaka away.

Ayaka's completely emotionless eyes caught sight of the gas mask.

"...What are you doing?"

"It's not me you should be asking that. Do you know what you are doing yourself? Look at Kyousuke, he's totally not in a state where he's capable of answering."

"------"

As though urged by a voice that was almost silenced, Ayaka looked at Kyousuke.

Sweating profusely on his forehead, Kyousuke was clutching his belly, completely in a daze.

Seeing Kyousuke like that, Ayaka's eyes...

"......Oh."

She recovered her rationality.

"Onii-chan!"

She frantically knelt down to ask if Kyousuke was alright.

Those dry eyes were moistened with tears as they frantically wandered in space.

"A-Ahhhhhhhhh... S-Sorry... Sorry! S-So sorry! Ayaka had blood rushing to her head, so Ayaka accidentally... Sorry! So so sorry! Sob sob... Does it hurt? It must hurt... Ah... W-W-W-W-W-What to do... Ayaka can't believe she did this to Onii-chan... Sorry... Sorry, Onii-chan! Ah, oh no... Sorry, sorry... Sorry sor--"

"Ayaka."

Kyousuke gently placed his hand on Ayaka's head while she apologized nonstop.

As Ayaka suddenly looked up, he forced a smile.

"It's okay. You don't need to, apologize..."

"Onii-chan..."

Gazing at her face that was covered in tears, he gently stroked her hair.

"...It's nothing, body-wise. It's just a strike on the belly, it's nothing really, so don't worry that much."

"Onii-chan, umm... A-Are you... angry?"

"I'm not angry. How could I be angry? Rather, I should be the one apologizing... It's my bad for making you so angry. Your brother is so useless, so sorry about that..."

"...!?"

Ayaka's facial expression instantly broke down. As though trying to hide her away, Kyousuke buried her in his bosom.

A moist voice whispered quietly "...'s not your bad."

Seeing Kyousuke gently stroke Ayaka's back, Renko went "shuko..." in relief.

Eiri and Maina also relaxed as the incident seemed to have drawn to a close.

--The next morning...

Ayaka sought even more than before to make Kyousuke dote on her.

Question 4 - The Gradually Breaking World / "Can You Feel My Heart?"

Akabane Eiri

Q: What is your target ranking for the final exams?

A: No target.

Q: Strongest and weakest subjects?

A: No strongest subject.

Q: What will you do if you are granted parole?

A: Who cares. Don't want to go shopping on a date, don't want to wear cute clothes, don't want to eat sweet food, don't want to cuddle stuffed toys!

Q: Please muster your vigor and make your exam declaration!

A: Who cares, it's hopeless after all...

Can You Feel My Heart?
壊れて逝く世界
問四

Q.期末テストの目標順位は?

別に。目標とかないし。

Q.得意な教科と苦手な教科は?

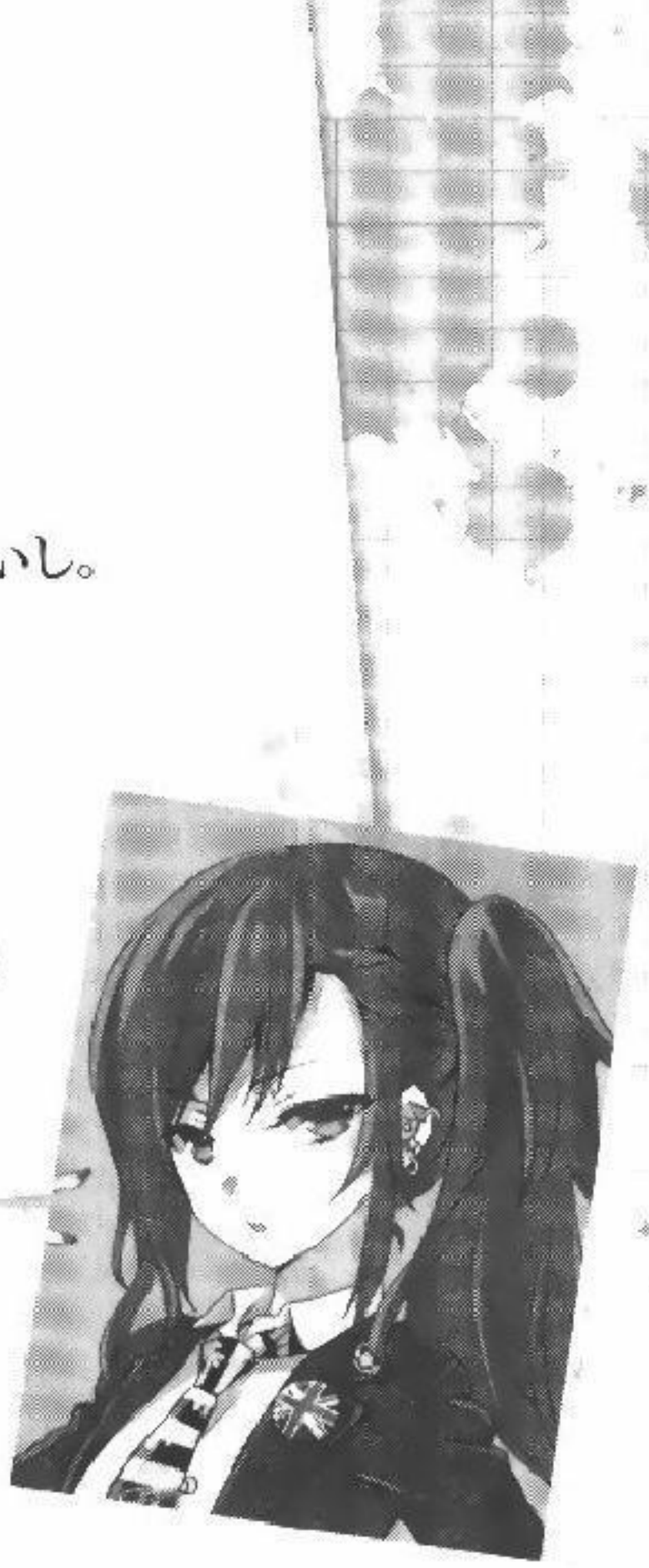
別に。得意な教科とかないし。

Q.仮釈放されたら何をしたいですか?

別に。ショッピングデートとかしたくないし。
可愛い服とかいらないし。
甘いものとか食べたくないし。
ぬいぐるみとかモフりたくないし!

Q.テストに対する意気込みをどうぞ!

別に。どうせダメだし……。



"...Oh dear. Where are you going, Onii-chan?"

It was break time after second period. As soon as the bell rang for the end of the period, Kyousuke stood up. Ayaka immediately questioned him. When Kyousuke answered "to the toilet", Ayaka said matter-of-factly:

"Okay, then Ayaka is coming too!"

She said it.

Hearing the predictable answer, Kyousuke felt utterly powerless. In the two days since the cooking practical, Ayaka's clinginess to Kyousuke had shot through the roof.

Always holding hands when walking, hugging him and going "love ya" for no particular reason, entwining the two of them arm in arm whenever sitting beside him, feeding him with prompts of "ah~" during meals, always trying to talk to him all the time.

This was the way ever since she transferred here. Ayaka did not wish to leave Kyousuke's side for even a second. Yesterday, she finally followed him to the male washroom. It would have been fine if she stayed outside, but she followed him inside.

Going to the toilet with someone speaking to him in a cheerful voice, that feeling was utterly disturbing.

Finally, it even developed into a situation where she would go "Let Ayaka see, let Ayaka see..." and try to peep, absolutely intolerable.

Even though Ayaka said "this is to take a urine test to check Onii-chan's health!", Kyousuke truly wished she could understand how a brother felt about a little sister performing urine tests for him.

He was utterly drained for the past two days by her clingy behavior.

Even though his feelings for the beloved little sister remained unchanged, Kyousuke could not help but feel a bit irritated.

If Ayaka followed him into the washroom again, it would be a pain, so just in case--

"Umm, Ayaka is going too... To wash your hands?"

"No. Just accompanying Onii-chan."

"Oh... I see."

He asked and got a nonchalant answer.

Although he could not bear to treat Ayaka coldly, Kyousuke decided he should draw a line here.

"Sorry Ayaka. Can you wait for me in the classroom?"

"Why?"

"Because... I-It's very embarrassing."

"You dislike it?"

"To be honest, it doesn't make me happy."

"....."

Ayaka lowered her gaze, making a scary expression and began to ponder silently.

Soon after, perhaps reaching a conclusion, she smiled and nodded.

"Ayaka understands! Since Onii-chan doesn't like it, Ayaka will wait obediently."

"Yeah, sorry... I'll be right back."

"Yes, have fun! Is it number two?"

"......Number one."

Don't deliberately ask these kinds of questions, okay? --Kyousuke thought as he left the classroom.

Passing through the corridor where murderers were gathered, he entered the nearest male washroom.

Although he left on his own accord, Kyousuke still felt a little concerned about leaving Ayaka by herself. Maina and Eiri were in the classroom, but those troublesome classmates were nothing to sneeze at.

Kyousuke quickly finished his business, washed his hands and was about to return to the classroom--

"Wait."

Just as he was leaving, someone called to him.

A girl was standing in the corridor in front of the male washroom, playing with the tip of her ponytail, looking lethargic.

"...Eiri? Why aren't you in the classroom?"

"I followed you."

"Eh!? No way, I'm going to the toilet and... you...!?"

"...Huh? Of course not. You want to get cut?"

Her sharp gaze pierced his lower abdomen. Kyousuke trembled in all sorts of senses.

"...Tsk." Eiri clicked her tongue and stood up from leaning against the wall.

She quickly approached.

"About your sister, I need to say something first."

"......Huh?"

Eiri pulled Kyousuke to a corner in the corridor and lowered her voice:

"Say... How do you feel about that girl?"

"What do you mean, how? Of course I treasure her very much--"

"Not that. Her attitude."

"Oh..."

After transferring to this school, Ayaka was always offensive due to jealousy, always giving off a very prickly impression.

Then there was her excessive clinginess to Kyousuke...

Ayaka did not act this way in the past.

Friendly and virtuous, she was praised by everyone as a good girl. Completely opposite to the notorious older brother, she was an honors student, extremely competent beyond imagination. Kyousuke's prided little sister.

But the Ayaka right now--

"...Isn't it only natural?"

Eiri was shocked by Kyousuke saying that he totally understood his little sister.

"Have you forgotten what place this is? A school where murderers are gathered. Suddenly thrown in here, it would be weird if she acted the same as usual."

"Hmm..."

Eiri was right. But for a brief instant, Kyousuke still felt that something was wrong about why things were like this.

Just as Kyousuke tried to figure out the truth, Eiri continued:

"I think she's probably unsettled. Unable to lower her guard against anyone, treating everyone as enemies... It's the same for me, so I think I can relate. In her case, she doesn't even have a kill count as a title... In order not to be underestimated, she expresses pointless antagonism, this is also understandable. But for that girl, you're the only exception, right?"

The rust-red eyes glinted with accusation that pierced Kyousuke.

"You're the only blood relative she can trust from the bottom of her heart. The family she had to see even if she had to commit murder. It's just excessive clinginess, so just indulge her, okay...? Because you are the only person she can relax and lower her guard against. That's the conclusion I reached after seeing how she is in the dorms."

"...Ayaka in the dorms?"

"Yes. To be honest, she becomes a totally different person, you know? I think because you're not around, she doesn't speak at all. Even when Maina and I talk to her, she ignores us. It seems like she doesn't feel inclined to interact with us on her own accord. The first question she asked me were stuff like: 'Are you really friends?' 'How close are you exactly?' 'What do you think of my Onii-chan?'... All questions about you. And I felt a strong sense of wariness."

"...Really."

"Really. So Kyousuke... Care for her more, okay? Don't worry about us. 'Who do you like best?' She asked you that during the cooking practical, right? Perhaps you were being considerate of our feelings... But it's best if you stopped that. Right now, you should only consider that girl's feelings. You are the only person she has, yet you're prioritizing others. This will make her very unsettled."

"Eiri..."

"Of course, eventually I'd like to befriend her and tell her my hidden story. But I think it's too early right now. Anyway, you have to be a good 'older brother' for now and support her. That's what I wanted to talk to you about."

Saying that, Eiri tossed her hair, avoided eye contact and scratched her face.

Her attitude made Kyousuke quite surprised and happy.

Eiri was more considerate for Ayaka than he imagined. Feeling that there was no need to be hasty, Kyousuke was really thankful.

Eiri was also caring for Ayaka in her own way.

Hence, Kyousuke also--

"...You're right. I have to support her properly first. Thank you, Eiri, for being so considerate for Ayaka."

"Yes. You just need to keep that girl in your thoughts. We will find ways to handle our own matters. In other words, umm... I-Indulge me a little, okay?"

Throwing these words out, Eiri blushed.

Fidgeting with the tip of her ponytail, she pouted sulkily. Although her words were blunt, her actions were completely different. Eiri managed to convey her thoughts afer all.

Seeing Eiri like this, Kyousuke felt an uncontrollable surge of joy and gratitude.

"Wow! Thank you, Eiri~~~~~~~~!"

"Kyahhhhh!?"

As though trying to spread out his feelings, Kyousuke stroked Eiri's head randomly with both hands.

Eiri exclaimed in surprise, going stiff.

"Y-Y-Y-Y-Y-You... What are you doing... W-W-W-W-W-What are you--"

"--Oh!? S-Sorry... Accident."

Recovering his senses, Kyousuke withdrew his hands.

Her hair messed up like a bird's nest, Eiri was at a loss, her mouth opening and closing.

"...A-Accident... Acci... dent..."

Her shoulders shook intensely and her face instantly turned bright red.

The color of shock in her eyes was gradually replaced by that of wrath.

"Y-You bastard... Rein in your jokes, okay!?"

"Guh!? I'm really sorry... But see, you just told me to indulge you--"

"I don't mean in a physical sense, idiot! Molester! Pervert!"

Eiri scolded him repeatedly and frantically fixed up her hair.

Stepping back from Kyousuke, she murmured in a whisper:

"I almost thought my heart would stop... I-I haven't prepared myself yet..."

"...Huh? What are you murmuring about?"

"I said, just go die already!"

"D-Don't get angry... It's my bad. But I'm very happy."

"...Sigh. Just save these feelings for your sister, okay?"

Eiri sighed, staring at Kyousuke with half-closed eyes.

Fixing her hair with a displeased look on her face, she tried to change the mood:

"ANYWAY! I've said what I wanted. Hurry back over to that girl. She must be very lonely right now."

"...Yeah. You're right. Thanks for going out of your way to remind me, Eiri."

"It's nothing."

Eiri waved her hand nonchalantly and walked away. As usual, she acted like nothing concerned her.

Even so, at the very last second, Kyousuke could see a faint smile blooming on the side of her face.

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"Took you long enough, Onii-chan. Wasn't it number one?"

Ayaka cheerfully went up to greet her older brother who had returned to the classroom.

Although Maina had stayed behind, Ayaka looked like she had not spoken with Maina at all. Kyousuke had sneaked a glance at them before coming in and the two of them had been silent with heads bowed.

Ayaka would be very quiet when Kyousuke was not around, not initiating any contact with others--what Eiri told him just now flashed across his mind. Ever since the cooking practical, her relationships with Eiri and Maina had not made any progress.

Although this pained Kyousuke greatly, he still chose to endure.

--Right now, he must focus on caring for Ayaka first.

"Oh sorry. For some reason, I suddenly had diarrhea."

Because Eiri had parted ways at the female washroom, Kyousuke returned by himself.

Ayaka stared at Kyousuke while he attempted to make an excuse.

"...W-What's the matter?"

"Suspicious."

"Huh?"

"You really went to the toilet?"

"O-Of course."

"Hmm~?"

Gazing at an empty seat across a desk, Ayaka stood up.

Bringing her face close to Kyousuke, she began to sniff.

"...Stinky."

"Eh!?"

Ayaka frowned and began to sniff all over Kyousuke's body.

Belly, chest, shoulders, arms... Her nose crawled all over his body, sniffing thoroughly.

Faced with his sister's overly sudden and weird behavior, Kyousuke felt very troubled.

"This... What are you doing--"

"...It's her again. Dummy-Bane-san again."

"Huh?"

"There's Dummy-Bane-san's smell on Onii-chan's body!"

When sniffing his right hand, Ayaka looked up and glared at Kyousuke.

In her distant-looking eyes of darkness, the flames of wrath were swirling.

"What happened with Dummy-Bane-san?"

"N-Nothing..."

"Liar."

"I'm not lying!"

"Then nothing happened, you say?"

"Of course! I just went to the toilet--"

"LIAAA

"...So mean. Hey, why are you lying? Why are you hiding things from Ayaka? Why aren't you speaking? So mean, Onii-chan, so mean... Ayaka clearly trusts Onii-chan so much, but Onii-chan... Sob sob sob sob sob sob. Why? Why!? Why why why why why must Onii-chan--"

"...What do you mean, why?"

Just as Ayaka exploded in a gruff voice again, the center of the storm, Eiri, returned.

She was standing near the doorway, checking out the weird atmosphere inside the classroom.

"------"

Ayaka's movements stopped.

She took her hand away from Kyousuke's chest.

Slowly, slowly, Ayaka turned her head...

"Hey, you bunch of swine. The bell is about to ring for class, got that ? Get back to your seats."

The instant, she looked back, the homeroom teacher appeared from behind Eiri. "...Oh." Ayaka leaked a sound, her hand stopped in the middle of reaching for her desk.

The mechanical pencil emerged from the pencil case she was aiming for.

"...Hmm?" Kurumiya frowned.

"What's the matter, Kamiya the younger? You're making a face like a vengeful ghost."

"Nothing nothing! Nothing at all, just a lovers quarrel."

Tensing her arm, Ayaka waved her hand humorously, acting like the usual little sister.

Eiri blinked, looking like she had yet to grasp the situation.

"Hmm..." Kurumiya rested her chin on her hand.

"Whatever. Hey swine, sit down properly for me! We're having a pop quiz this class. The topics covered will be just as broad as the final exams, so answer carefully.

Just as Kurumiya stood at the lectern, the bell rang for the start of class.

"...?"

Eiri looked at the siblings in a questioning gaze then returned to her seat.

In response, Ayaka smiled suggestively.

Kyousuke lowered his gaze and had no choice but to bow his head.

The result of the pop quiz was totally tragic.

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"Dummy-Bane-san. During the break between periods, what were you doing with Onii-chan?"

As soon as the period ended, Ayaka instantly got up and went over to Eiri's seat. In the middle of carefully taking notes, a rare act for her, Eiri stopped writing and looked up at the tenderly smiling Ayaka.

After a brief silence, Eiri frowned.

"...We exchanged a few words while brushing past each other's shoulders in the corridor, what about it?"

She immediately resumed writing after answering.

Her pen was then--Slam! A hand smacked down on it.

"You're lying, right?"

"...Huh? Of course I'm not lying."

Halted in the middle of her task, Eiri was showing a very disagreeable face.

Ayaka presented her "evidence" in front of Eiri's eyes. Held between the thumb and index finger of her left hand was a strand of rust-red hair.

"Dummy-Bane-san, this is your hair, right? It was hanging on Onii-chan's shoulder."

"....."

Eiri glanced at Kyousuke.

"Oh? Really? When did it get there? How incredible."

"Yes~ Very incredible~ Too incredible..."

Seeing Eiri intending to feign ignorance, Ayaka's forehead twitched.

She waved the hair in her hand and increased the emphasis in her tone of voice:

"Onii-chan didn't have this before going to the washroom! If you only exchanged a few words, why is there a hair hanging on him? It shouldn't be there, right!?"

"...Didn't it get on him when our shoulders brushed past each other?"

"Oh, so that's how it happened... No way! Dummy-Bane-san, is your hair loss that severe? Then you should be called Baldy-Bane-san instead."

"...What if it is?"

"No way! Please stop changing the subject!"

"You're the one who started it..."

Eiri grumbled in exasperation.

Even so, Ayaka still refused to let up.

Ayaka leaned forward and brought her face up close, questioning:

"Also, there's a smell."

"...Smell?"

"Yes. Onii-chan's chest has your smell--"

Saying that, she sniffed with her nose.

"Stinky!" Ayaka twisted her face.

"This smell is so bad that it's like a sow's, you know?"

"...What did you say?"

"Oh sorry, it's not like a sow's but it is a sow's. Stinky stinky~!"

"......Tsk."

Eiri clicked her tongue at Ayaka who was holding her nose and fanning with her hand.

Kyousuke could not bear to watch any further and spoke up to reprimand Ayaka.

"Hey, you're getting out of line! Show some restraint."

"Sob sob... Onii-chan is standing on Dummy-Bane-san's side, not protecting Ayaka?"

"...Uh. W-Well--"

Gazed at by Ayaka's sorrowful eyes, Kyousuke could only shut up.

Then Eiri gazed at him in reprimand.

Recalling what she had told him during the break, Kyousuke shook his head.

"...No, of course I'm standing on Ayaka's side."

"Onii-chan..."

Hearing Kyousuke's vigorous response, Ayaka calmed down.

Her earlier expression of sadness instantly bloomed into a smile.

"--Then why are you lying?"

"...Huh?"

"Stop going 'huh?', okay!? Nothing happened between Onii-chan and Dummy-Bane-san, that's a lie, right? Onii-chan is clearly standing on Ayaka's side, but why lie? Why are you hiding the fact that you were with Dummy-Bane-san? It's very contradictory, you know? Ayaka feels very troubled."

Ayaka scolded Kyousuke without changing her smile.

Kyousuke broke out in cold sweat on his back.

"W-Well... Umm--"

"Apologies for the interruption."

Just then, a familiar voice was heard.

Kyousuke looked at the front of the classroom to see a girl peering in from the doorway.

Honey-colored hair with emerald eyes. A beautiful girl who looked as lovely as a western doll.

"Syamaya-senpai? Why did you come here...?"

"Ufufu. I just happened to be on lunch patrol. Greetings to you, everyone."

Syamaya leaned half her body through the doorway and waved.

A yellow armband reading "Discipline Committee" was worn on her arm. Despite the fact that she claimed to be patrolling the school, it was the first time for Kyousuke to witness Syamaya or any other upperclassman in the old school building.

He could only conclude that she had other goals in mind.

"...She appeared, the slut."

Noticing Syamaya's arrival, Ayaka remarked with irritation.

But Syamaya's smile remained.

"Hello again, Kyousuke-sama's little sister. I recall that your name is... Ayaka-san, isn't that right?"

"Please don't call Ayaka so nonchalantly. Ears will rot."

"My, you're still harsh as always... Oh well, no matter."

Syamaya cleared her throat and looked around.

"Looks like Hikawa-san is not present here... Perfect. Then let's take this opportunity to settle things. Ufufufufu."

Smiling, a mysterious light flashed in Syamaya's eyes.

Syamaya had suffered greatly on account of Kyousuke's group last week. Since the misunderstanding still had not been cleared, she probably believed that she had been treated cruelly.

--Kyousuke did not think that a psychopath like Syamaya would let bygones be bygones so easily.

"Kyousuke-sama. Ever since what happened last time, I have been doing a lot of thinking, you know? Ever since I heard you say you dislike me, I've been

thinking about it every night... I've been thinking of playing it safe and withdrawing. But then I am still unable to give up... I have made my decision. Even if I have to be a bit forceful, I must make Kyousuke-sama mine! Even if this is just my wishful thinking, even if it might cause you trouble, Kyousuke-sama... I still want to approach you in my own manner!"

Syamaya expressed her feelings for Kyousuke and walked in from behind the door.

She was holding a white-coated hard-shelled case in her hand, resembling the rectangular type used for carrying musical instruments. Exquisite metallic patterns were crafted on its surface.

"...Ah.' Seeing the case, Ayaka screamed.

"Crap--" Eiri also went pale and cried out desperately towards Kyousuke and the other students.

"It's a gun, run away!"

" " "......!?" " "

Hearing Eiri's yell, the students all froze. Syamaya placed the hard case on the floor and prepared to open the clasp.

Realizing the danger, Kyousuke swiftly sprang into action, pushing desks aside and charging at her.

"Uooooooooooooooo!"

"Kyah, what!?"

Just as she was about to take the gun out, Syamaya was knocked back and pinned on the ground.

Her arms immobilized behind her back, Syamaya struggled violently.

"Ahhhhhh, Kyousuke-sama... This is too intense. Please don't get too violent! Be more gentle in the beginning. Also, I can't believe you're *doing it*... in full view of the public. Although I am a closet masochist... But doing this so suddenly, it's a bit too high-level for me. We still haven't held hands yet! Can't we connect in a different way first!?"

"What rubbish are you talking about, person who was about to shoot a gun!?"

"...What? Gun? What are you talking about, Kyousuke-sama?"

"...Because, inside this case--"

Kyousuke looked tensely at the hard case.

"Oh." Syamaya comprehended.

"No. Although this is a case for carrying firearms, I'm currently using it as a lunchbox. Because I couldn't find a suitable container, that's why..."

Kyousuke looked into the firearm case that was used to contain homemade cooking instead of a gun.

Inside, half of it contained different kinds of sandwiches while the other half carried deep-fried chicken, fried egg, meatballs and sausages, separated neatly with partitions.

"....."

The tense atmosphere relaxed, bringing forth a cold silence.

Syamaya squirmed awkwardly in embarrassment.

"U-Umm... Kyousuke-sama? Since the misunderstanding is cleared, could you release me? If you maintain this kind of intimate contact, I'll... start acting weird! Ha~ Ha~ Kyousuke-sama, your arm is so rough, it feels so pleasurable~ ...Ahhhhh. Come on! Forget about the lunchbox, enjoy Syamaya first--"

"No thanks."

"...Tsk."

Kyousuke instantly jumped up while Syamaya stood up in disappointment.

Finding out it was just a misunderstanding, the classmates grumbled and returned to what they were doing. "What the heck..." "Scared me." "Don't make a big deal out of nothing!" "'It's a gun, run away!' What the fuck, sheesh..." "Go die!" "That's why they say flat chests always make a big deal out of everything..."

"*Kusukusu*," Ayaka sneered.

"Dummy-Bane-san, what an embarrassment. Good work misunderstanding."

"S-Shut up! It's that girl's fault for obfuscating..."

"You're blushing~? *Kusukusu*. By the way, how much longer are you going to stick to Ayaka!? The sow smell will transfer, let go now!"

Eiri had hugged Ayaka to protect her. "Kyah!?" Ayaka knocked her away.

Maina poked her face out from under the desk, looking around. "A-Ah...?"

"Ufufu. I apologize for how things turned out. I made a lunchbox for all of you! Eating leftovers all the time is not good for health, you know? Although this might be too forward of me, I am doing this to improve Kyousuke's impression of me--correction, to make everyone happy, so I spent all night preparing this, okay?"

Syamaya picked up the case in her hands and presented it to Kyousuke.

Packed full, it easily exceeded four people's portions.

"You made all of this, Syamaya-senpai...?"

"Of course! I am quite skilled in cooking. Appearances go without saying, but I can guarantee the taste as well. The ingredients were carefully selected and the meat was only strangled and dismembered last night, it's very fresh~"

"Not human flesh, I hope?"

"......Of course not."

"What's with that weird pause!? Coming from Senpai, I can't treat it as a joke!"

"Ufufufufu. Don't worry. The meat is chicken, not human flesh. This is game fowl borrowed from the chicken coop in the Purgatory Garden. They were very violent, so it took a lot of effort..."

"That must be against the rules. You'll get disciplined once it comes to light..."

"Yes. Actually, it has been discovered already. That's why I was called out earlier and told 'I will make you suffer the same fate as chickens.' The Discipline Committee's advisor, Miduchi-sensei, is famous as the school's number one in kindness, but she's also very famous for being number one scary when angered. Due to an unfortunate incident several days earlier, I was beaten severely for three days and three nights, losing consciousness almost a thousand times."

--That's way too scary. I'm surprised you survived.

Nevertheless, she still continued to cause issues which meant that this could not end well.

Unconcerned about Kyousuke's warning of care, Syamaya smiled "ufufu."

"This time I might end up killed. But I don't mind! If it succeeds in making you happy, Kyousuke-sama, my wish will be fulfilled... Because I love you deeply, Kyousuke-sama! For love, I will gladly hand over my life in joy. Syamaya has decided. Come, accept it, please accept the lunchbox I prepared personally, saturated with love, Kyousuke-sama! With this, Syamaya shall pass away, able to rest in peace..."

Syamaya's eyes gave off radiant light as she handed the case over.

This weight was more than imagined. Kyousuke felt it both in his arms and in his heart. Careful not to drop the case, he received it stably.

"...T-Thank you very much."

"I am the one who should be grateful! Ah, with this, I can finally meet death without worry... Farewell, Kyousuke-sama. Should we meet again, please do embrace Syamaya with fervent passion? Just a single hug, I shall be satisfied--"

Crash!

In the next instant, the case was knocked flying.

The handmade lunchbox fell from Kyousuke's hands, scattering its contents everywhere.

" "------" "

Syamaya stopped moving. Kyousuke's breathing stopped.

Too sudden. To the point that they did not know what happened.

The lunchbox was tragically fallen on the ground, upside down.

The remains of the food and sandwiches were all over the floor.

Seeing this, Syamaya and Kyousuke froze.

Then--

"Seriously! Don't be deceived, Onii-chan. Because Slut-senpai is super vicious, the Murderer Princess who's totally depraved. You were almost killed, did you know that? What if it's poisoned? Sigh... That was so close!"

Ayaka sighed and wiped her cold sweat.

She had attacked from the side, knocking the hard case flying.

"You, what did--"

"Didn't Ayaka just say? Ayaka protected Onii-chan from Slut-senpai's evil clutches. Onii-chan needs to be more aware of danger! No matter how pretty they are... If you're careless, you'll be killed, okay? Got that!?"

Ayaka glared angrily at Kyousuke.

"N-No matter what, this is--"

"...Didn't... poi..."

"What?"

Syamaya leaked a moan from her lips.

Just as Ayaka turned towards Syamaya, Syamaya's lowered face bounced up.

"I didn't poison it! Just as I said, I only added one special condiment to my cooking. And that's love ●!"

...Just now, wasn't there a very dangerous word that followed "love"?

"Hey!" Ayaka approached Syamaya.

"Please don't add weird stuff! Isn't that poison? Eating stuff that's been dirtied by your love, even Onii-chan will get dirty, how are you going to compensate for that!? You fucking whore!"

"F-Fucking whore... How dare you! Not only did you waste the food I painstakingly prepared, you're also being most impudent! I am tolerating you repeatedly only because you are Kyousuke-sama's little sister, but my toleration has limits! I am going to be angry... I demand an apology, Ayaka-san."

"Refused. Senpai, you should apologize instead."

"What!? Why do I need to apologize!?"

"You tried to poison Onii-chan, didn't you?"

"That notion did not cross my mind the slightest. I absolutely did not poison--"

"Then please eat it."

".....Huh?"

"Please eat it yourself, Senpai. If you're willing to eat it, Ayaka will admit that Senpai did not poison the food. Ayaka will admit that Senpai did not try to harm Onii-chan."

Ayaka pointed at the overturned lunchbox on the floor, a smile all over her face.

Syamaya went expressionless.

"...You are asking me to eat food off the ground?"

"That's right, that's right. Although it's dirtied by the dust, the food was soiled by Senpai's love to begin with, so it's all the same. Or are you scared of eating it because you poisoned the food?"

"------"

The light vanished from Syamaya's eyes.

While Ayaka was jeering *kusukusu*, she took a step forward.

"I understand."

".....Eh?"

"If this bit of insult will redeem my sullied name, I shall gladly accept it! Compared to my love for Kyousuke-sama, my pride and dignity is nothing."

Syamaya knelt down without hesitation, cushioning her knee with the hem of her skirt. Sweeping her honey-colored hair behind her ear, she picked up a piece of fried chicken in front of her.

While Ayaka watched in surprise, she patted the dust off it lightly.

"Well then, I shall--"

"I'll have it."

--Whoosh.

The fried chicken was snatched away from above.

" "Ah!?" " Syamaya and Ayaka's voices overlapped.

Their gazes pointed at the one who snatched the piece of chicken and ate it...

"Wow, it's tasty."

"......Kyousuke...-sama?"

Syamaya froze utterly.

Finished eating, Kyousuke smiled

"Senpai's cooking is really good. Tastes so good even after it's gone cold, amazing. Thanks for the treat!"

"K-Kyousuke-sama... Don't you dislike me?"

"I actually don't dislike you. Although that was what I was trying to say... I was interrupted at a bad moment, causing a misunderstanding. I'm very sorry. Also about my sister--"

"Don't let it weigh on your mind. You don't have to apologize."

Interrupting Kyousuke's apology, Syamaya stood up.

"Kyousuke-sama, you told me my cooking is 'tasty'... You said you 'don't dislike me', I am fully satisfied with that already. Ufufu."

Placing her hand on her chest, Syamaya smiled happily.

This was the face of a maiden in love, completely failing to live up to the moniker of the Murderer Princess.

"Syamaya-senpai..."

Kyousuke witnessed it unintentionally.

"----------"

The second Kyousuke ate the piece of fried chicken, Ayaka had kept her head down. The intense emotions in her heart were about to explode any moment, feeling like they were boiling, however...

Under such circumstances, Kyousuke really felt that he could not stand on Ayaka's side.

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Syamaya had left after reclaiming the hard case because "the punishment room is calling for me."

After cleaning up the food on the floor, Kyousuke turned to Ayaka again.

In the end, Ayaka had remained silent even till Syamaya left the classroom.

"...Hey, Ayaka."

Kyousuke made his decision and spoke to Ayaka who was motionless with her head down.

As much as he tried to control himself, he still could not avoid using a harsh tone of voice.

"No matter what, you went too far in your words and actions. Maybe you feel distrust and revulsion for her because she's a murderer, but at least... You can't talk like that. Anyone will get mad if they're getting insulted like that. Anyone

will feel hurt when others do something so mean-spirited. Even murderers are people, just like us. Do you understand, Ayaka?"

"------"

Giving no response even when asked a question, Kyousuke got more and more mad.

Placing both hands on Ayaka's shoulders, he spoke in a forceful tone of voice.

"Not just Syamaya-senpai... It's the same with the way you're treating Eiri and Maina. I know you feel very unsettled, suddenly thrown in this kind of place. I also know you can't easily trust those people who've killed before. I also know you can't tolerate other people hassling me. But Ayaka, throwing unnecessary tantrums is only going to piss off people around you... You'll end up making everyone unwilling to approach you, y'know? Like how I was back outside--"

"...know... nothing..."

"Huh?"

"Onii-chan, you know nothing!"

Shaking off Kyousuke's hands, Ayaka screamed shrilly.

Glaring at Kyousuke who backed away, she screamed hysterically.

"Ayaka's reason for feeling unsettled, Ayaka's reason for getting offended by the sight of those people, Ayaka's reason for getting angry, Onii-chan knows nothing at all! Not even the slightest bit!!!'

Her twintails jumped randomly.

She looked just like a willful child, unwilling to listen to anything.

Perhaps Kyousuke was unable to understand.

Despite having always lived together in the past..

"I don't know, Ayaka! Why you're mad, I don't know at all! Can't you tell me clearly? If you spell it out, I can also--"

"How could Ayaka possibly say it!"

Ayaka stared at Kyousuke in disappointment.

"...Forget it."

Sulking, she suddenly turned her face away.

Kyousuke felt blood rush to his brain.

"What do you mean, forget it!? If you want to say it, just spit it out."

"No."

"...Out with it."

"No!"

"I'm telling you to say it!"

"No means no!"

"I'm telling you to say it, don't you understand!?"

"No no no!!!"

Ayaka refused vehemently while Kyousuke questioned her stubbornly.

While the two of them glared at each other, a third party intervened.

"You two are too worked up."

" "....." "

Enduring their gazes, Eiri said calmly:

"How about you change locations? Having an argument in this kind of place will only cause trouble and it's very conspicuous. Just go after cleaning the food off the floor, okay? Use this time to take a walk and calm down--"

"Who asked you to interrupt!? DUMMY-BANE-SAN!!"

Instantly, Ayaka crashed forcefully into Eiri, blowing her away.

"Kyah!"

Eiri lost balance and fell over.

While she was falling, a desk got caught up and toppled, scattering textbooks and notebooks all over the floor.

Because it happened too suddenly, Kyousuke's thoughts stopped for a few seconds.

"What crazy strength... As expected of Kyousuke's sister."

"Eiri! Are you okay!?"

"...I'm fine. Just a little surprised."

Responding to Kyousuke who had rushed over, Eiri raised her upper torso.

While supporting Eiri's body, Kyousuke glared at Ayaka.

"Hey Ayaka... You know there are things you can do and things you can't, right?"

"Onii-chan took the words right out of Ayaka's mouth. Onii-chan is protecting Dummy-Bane-san again! Does Onii-chan love Dummy-Bane-san so much? Such poor taste... Flat chest, stupid brain, disgusting cooking. You can tell she's clearly a useless sow just from one look. What's so good about this bitch--"

"Ayaka!"

"......!?"

Kyousuke roared angrily. Ayaka flinched and looked at him in puzzlement, going "O-Onii-chan...?"

Kyousuke felt guilty, looking into her wavering eyes, but he decided he could not go soft on Ayaka at this moment. Hence, he allowed his anger to take over, getting worked up.

"This isn't about protecting this person or that person, okay!? I'm angry at you for doing such terrible things."

"....."

"Apologize."

"....."

"Just one sentence. Apologize to Eiri, Ayaka."

"....."

"Apologize!"

As Kyousuke roared angrily again, Ayaka screamed "kyah!?", her eyes getting wet.

With her eyes opened wide to the extreme, tears were streaming down in a torrent.

Kyousuke endured the pain in his heart and looked at Ayaka.

Ayaka lowered her face to escape. Wiping her tears, she sobbed:

"O-Onii-chan..."

She called out to Kyousuke but he did not respond.

"Onii-chan~~~~~~... Sob sob."

She sobbed, trying to call for help. Nevertheless, Kyousuke was fighting a battle of his own against the urge to forgive her, wanting to reach out to her, meanwhile staring at her without saying a word.

"Sob sob sob sob sob sob sob sob sob sob sob sob sob sob sob sob sob..."

Ayaka curled up her body and cried in a whimpering manner.

Her sorrowful crying rapidly wore away at Kyousuke's heart.

"------"

Then it suddenly stopped.

Replacing it was a voice that was almost disappearing.

".....Wrong."

"Huh?"

"Wrong... Wrong wrong, wrong!"

Clutching her head, Ayaka shook her head like mad.

Her eyes lost focus as though she no longer registered where she was.

"Onii-chan doesn't say this kind of stuff... The Onii-chan that Ayaka knows won't do something so mean to Ayaka! The way it's supposed to be... Onii-chan will always shield Ayaka, protect Ayaka, help Ayaka, care for Ayaka, love Ayaka, but like this... This is too weird! Absolutely absolutely, there's absolutely a problem! No... This isn't Onii-chan... This isn't the Onii-chan... that Ayaka knows."

"...Huh? What are you talking about--"

"Don't touch Ayaka!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Ayaka flung away the hand Kyousuke had extended towards her, snarling.

Backing away from Kyousuke in a flash, Ayaka glared sharply at him.

"...Aya... ka?"

The flames burning in those dark eyes were composed of overt hostility.

Kyousuke was greatly shocked to see his beloved little sister showing such emotions towards him.

--Don't touch Ayaka.

Ayaka's words stabbed him in the chest, making Kyousuke unable to breathe, his mind gone blank.

"......~~~~~~"

Ayaka's gaze avoided the stunned Kyousuke as she suddenly rushed out.

Wait.

As much as Kyousuke tried to call after her, the words were stuck in his throat, unable to get out. Ayaka instantly passed by Kyousuke's side, passed in front of Eiri, leaving Maina in the classroom.

"Jeez everyone! How much longer are you going to wait before coming to the cafeteria--Kyah!?"

Pushing away the masked girl who appeared behind the sliding door, Ayaka dashed outside.

Her tapping footsteps grew more and more distant.

"Owwwwww... What the heck was that? It'd be dangerous if I didn't have the cushions known as boobs! Didn't teachers tell you not to run in the hallways!? Sheesh... This, oya? Why are you sitting in that kind of place, Eiri? Your panties

are showing, you know? This messy junk all over the floor... Huh? Where's Ayaka-chan?"

Only Renko, who had no idea about the situation, was tilting her head in puzzlement.

Thirty minutes had passed since the lunch break began.

Self Question - Turning Black / "May I Give You Hell?"
--The world was filled with trash. Kamiya Ayaka believed this.

Same for when watching the morning news. Same for when passing through crowds in the streets. Same for when listening to pop music. Same for when chatting with classmates. Same for when attending lessons seriously. Same for when rejecting invitations from friends. Same for when she displayed friendly smiles.

--Sigh, so boring. Ayaka sneered in her heart.

What started this feeling in Ayaka's heart happened five years earlier.

Back when she was in third grade, the entire class bullied her.

Ayaka did not know why. Perhaps there was no why to begin with.

If she had to say it, Ayaka was prettier than people around her, she was good at studying and very popular with the boys, also trusted by the teachers. Perhaps this sense of perfection was what incited jealousy in the hearts of many of her classmates (mostly girls). Perhaps they wanted to revel in a sense of exhilaration and superiority by seeing the perfect Ayaka in a tragic state.

Slightly before the bullying incidents, Ayaka had rejected the confession from the boy who was the most popular boy in the class back then. At the time, someone had said that the most influential girl in the class (shallow, competitive and a show-off, completely opposite in type to Ayaka) had a crush on this boy, but

Ayaka could not remember clearly anymore. Ayaka no longer knew who she heard it from either.

But by the time she noticed, her indoor shoes were already thrown away...

Starting from that incident, Ayaka was thrown out of the circle known as the homeroom.

A girl whom Ayaka originally considered a friend threw Ayaka's gym clothes into the toilet, then acted like strangers the next day. Her relationship with the girls whom she thought were her best friends gradually deteriorated, soon becoming no different from strangers. Possibly because fearing dislike from the girls, the boys also made the bullying worse for Ayaka. The teacher did not intervene and ignored it.

--No one protected Ayaka.

Even so, Ayaka would still pretend everything was normal when she returned home, smiling. As much as she did not wish her family to worry unnecessarily, on the other hand, she was also afraid. She was afraid that her father, mother and even brother might suddenly change their attitudes towards her, just like those people in school... if they found out that she was being bullied.

But one day--

On a certain morning two months after the bullying started...

Ayaka was wearing casual shoes because her indoor shoes were gone. Just when she had cleared off the graffiti on the desk, fifth grader Kyousuke suddenly arrived at the third grade classroom. Then he yelled with righteous fury:

"All you bastards, turn and face me now!"

Then like a storm, before the teachers could hurry over after receiving news, he interrogated each of Ayaka's classmates one by one.

--Who's the fucker who bullied my sister?

Ever since, the bullying against Ayaka subsided. Although some people were angry at Kyousuke and wanted revenge, they all ended up beaten and crying in pain. Obviously the sixth graders were no match, but even their friends from middle school were beaten up soundly by Kyousuke. Consequently, no one dared to oppose Kyousuke or bully Ayaka during her days in elementary school.

No one dared approach Ayaka either...

--However, Ayaka did not mind.

In her heart, her brother was not a problem child who liked to get into fights, but the savior and hero who had rescued her. Ayaka treated Kyousuke even better than before, whether inside or outside the home, and the two of them spent more time alone together.

Because Kyousuke's infamy spread outside the school, she would often encounter danger out in the streets as well, but every time, her brother protected her. Who knows how many times, he saved her again and again.

Hence, she was fine even if the two of them were alone--Or rather, just the two of them together was enough.

The solitary sister desired Kyousuke and the lonely brother needed Ayaka.

That was all. The world was already perfect.

Hence, redundant things were not needed.

After entering a private middle school, many people gathered around Ayaka and she was able to make friends, but these were ultimately superficial connections. These relationships were just social lubrication for school life. Ayaka did not want to deepen them, neither did she let them deepen.

They were nothing more than trash that could be swept away in one go if she wanted to. Totally worthless.

Back in elementary school, Ayaka had already decided. This world was nothing more than a convenient and disposable product. Whether the people she liked or the things she liked, no changes could stop the world from turning.

For Ayaka, only one thing was irreplaceable.

Kyousuke. Only Kyousuke. The one who would never abandon Ayaka, never betray Ayaka no matter what.

Because Kyousuke had always been shielding Ayaka, protecting Ayaka, helping Ayaka, caring for Ayaka, loving Ayaka.

In Ayaka's heart, Kyousuke was not ordinary trash but a precious treasure.

--However.

"Sob sob... Sob sob sob... Sob sob sob sob sob sob sob sob~~~~~~!"

In a deserted corner of the school, Ayaka hugged her knees while crying.

Before she rushed out of the classroom, Kyousuke's roaring words, his gaze towards her, all of that was occupying her mind firmly, impossible to dispel. Her falling tears were like blood dripping from an open wound.

A hole opened up in her broken heart. The bottomless unease and despair was like she had fallen into endless darkness.

Despite the fact that she had realized to some extent, the world was rapidly moving away from her.

"Sob sob... Why? Why did this happen, Onii-chan..."

She recalled how she had transferred to this school, meeting Kyousuke again.

The Kyousuke who had scolded her instead of showing joy after seeing her face.

The Kyousuke who was living a happy school life, surrounded by a whole crowd of girls.

The Kyousuke who was always spending time with other girls by his side instead of being alone with Ayaka.

The Kyousuke who was always prioritizing other people's feelings, treating Ayaka's feelings as rubbish.

The Kyousuke who was making out with other girls, sneakily hiding things from Ayaka.

The Kyousuke who commented "tasty" as though it was the most natural thing in the world when eating other girls' cooking.

The Kyousuke who glared at Ayaka, roaring mercilessly.

All of it did not belong to the Kyousuke that Ayaka knew so well.

During the days of separation, had her brother become someone different from the original brother...?

"...No. It's not like that. What changed Onii-chan was not time--"

--It was those bitches.

Those female murderers who approached Kyousuke.

It must be those bitches who deceived Kyousuke, bewitching him, making him abnormal.

It must be those bitches who soiled Ayaka's most important treasure, creating blemishes on the treasure, defiling it.

--Indeed. Indeed indeed indeed indeed indeed indeed indeed, indeed!

Thinking about it, Ayaka concluded that the times when Kyousuke acted strange were always related to that group of girls.

Due to his notorious name, basically no one approached Kyousuke, so he was weak to the opposite sex from lack of exposure. But here in this school, he was popular with the other sex, admired by the populace.

Innocent and naive Kyousuke was definitely bewitched.

Logically, Kyousuke had lost his direction, poisoned by those filthy sows.

Because he was thinking abnormally, that was why he said such mean things to Ayaka, that was why he made those scary eyes at Ayaka. Those sows were scheming in the background to make Kyousuke stop protecting Ayaka and only care about those sows.

--Just as one would expect. Apart from that, she could think of no other reason.

"......He must be rescued."

The unease and despair dominating Ayaka disappeared without trace while a sense of mission surged in her heart.

In the past, Ayaka was always rescued by Kyousuke.

Hence, it was her turn now. It was her turn to help and rescue her brother.

--But how?

Wasn't it obvious?

"*Kusukusu... Kusukusukusu... Kusukusukusukusukusu...*"

Ayaka could not help but burst into laughter. Her mood went from the absolute worst to being overjoyed.

As soon as she thought of what she was about to do, as soon as she thought about how she was going to rescue Kyousuke in this manner, she felt like she was going to be drowned in happiness.

Ayaka used to be a weak princess, always a damsel in distress waiting for her savior to rescue her.

But that had changed, starting then. The past was no longer.

As long as she could rescue Kyousuke, she was able to rival heroes.

To become a heroine and savior for her brother.

--Hence.

"...Just wait, okay? Ayaka will rescue Onii-chan. Ayaka can't let those sows soil Onii-chan any further. Absolutely, absolutely no more soiling!"

Ayaka firmed her resolve and clenched her fist tight.

Wiping her tears away, she suddenly looked up. Instantly...

"That's a great look on your face."

A figure entered Ayaka's view.

When did someone arrive? A certain person was standing before her.

Looking down at Ayaka, those eyes gave off ferocious yet gentle light.

"......Ah."

While Ayaka was in a daze, the figure laughed.

Smiling, the figure extended a hand.

"Allow me to help actualize the wishes in your heart?"

This hand was hope itself, the same hand that had pulled Ayaka up from despair three months earlier...

"--Yes."

Ayaka held that hand without hesitation.

Question 5 - Serenade of Sickness / "Farewell, Jane Doe?"

Kamiya Ayaka

Q: What is your target ranking for the final exams?

A: Number One. Ayaka won't lose to those retards who are funny in the head!

Q: Strongest and weakest subjects?

A: Good at all subjects. No subject is bad. Oh, but Ethics is slightly hard to understand...

Q: What will you do if you were granted parole?

A: Lovey-dovey time alone with Onii-chan! Ayaka doesn't want anyone in the way, so, Ayaka's room... Ehehe.

Q: Please muster your vigor and make your exam declaration!

A: Do your best, Onii-chan! Obtain parole together with Ayaka so that Ayaka can imprison you, okay?

Farewell, Jane Doe?
病み色の小夜曲

問五

Q.期末テストの目標順位は？

一位です。アタマのおかしいヒトたちに、
綾花が負けるわけありませんから！

Q.得意な教科と苦手な教科は？

得意な教科は全部で、苦手な教科はありません。
あ、でも道徳はちょっとよくわかんないです。

Q.仮釈放されたら何をしたいですか？

お兄ちゃんと二人でイチャイチャしたい！
邪魔が入ると困るから、綾花のお部屋で
……えへへ。

Q.テストに対する意気込みをどうぞ！

頑張ってね、お兄ちゃんっ！
綾花と二人で仮釈放して、
監禁ごっこしよ♪

"...Can't find her. Shit, where did she run off to?"

"I can't find her either. I even checked the Purgatory Garden..."

"Hoo... Where did she go? Ayaka-chan..."

"The school's premises are quite large, after all. If she really wants to hide, it'll be very hard to find her."

After school, Kyousuke and his friends were conducting a search within the school, leaving no stone unturned.

Roughly three hours had passed since Ayaka had run off. She had not returned at the end of the lunch break and skipped periods 4 and 5 without reason. Although Kyousuke was worried about the corresponding punishments, right now, the more dangerous matter was Ayaka's mental condition.

Kyousuke's heart was scorched mercilessly by anxiety and regret.

"It's my fault... Because I yelled at her, she took a heavy blow... Shit! If anything happens to her, I--"

Kyousuke could not help but punch the cleaning closet in front of him.

With a violent sound of destruction, the steel door caved in, broken.

A cool hand laid itself over Kyousuke's trembling fist.

"...Calm down. I know you're very emotional, but there are things you need to do right now, don't you? Don't lose yourself."

Speaking to Kyousuke, Eiri lowered her sad gaze.

No matter who was right or wrong, she was the reason why Kyouske scolded Ayaka. That was probably why Eiri felt guilty. Her thoughts and feelings were conveyed by the way she bit her lip tight.

"...Yeah, you're right. You're right... We can't start lamenting and throwing blame around. I have to calm down. I have to calm down and find Ayaka properly."

Kyousuke released his fist and changed his mood.

"Yeah. We've searched everywhere in sight, so what's left is--"

"The new school building side? Shuko... That place sure has treated us well recently. If she sneaked in there secretly while lessons were in progress, she might be hiding in one of the washroom stalls right now. There are still places to look, are we all going together?"

"Let's do it. We could simply ask Syamaya-senpai for help..."

Syamaya had probably received discipline during the lunch break so now might be a bad time. Furthermore, it felt too selfish to ask her to help Ayaka immediately after her conflict with Ayaka earlier.

"Syamaya-chan huh... Foosh. Just leave this kind of situation to me! Even if she's unwilling I'll make her submit. I'll play with her until she collapses."

"...You're really merciless with Syamaya-senpai."

Terrible. Kyousuke expressed his sympathies. Maina went "umm umm" and spoke up:

"Like Syamaya-senpai, all the second-years are taking professional killer courses, right? What do we do if they target us..."

"What, don't worry! Don't we have two highly skilled killers on our side too? Giant boobs plus a flat chest. As long as you have me and Eiri as the uneven undulating combo, there's nothing to be afraid of!"

"Yeah, that's right. If you run into any danger, just leave this bitch behind and run."

"Ehhhhhhh!? So mean, Eiri! I can't believe you're treating me as a meat shield... If I get caught, who knows what they'll do to me. Are we having a gang ● school

after the open-jail school last time? No way! My body won't be able to take it! But if we're doing it, I'll try hard to stall for time..."

"......Hey. Stop saying nonsense. Hurry and search."

Kyousuke was surprised by the totally relaxed banter while he walked.

But thanks to these girls, his heart was getting refilled with power.

Perhaps Renko was trying to make them relax a bit by deliberately acting in such a ridiculous manner.

Eiri walked side by side with Kyousuke while Maina and Renko followed after them.

Soon, just as the shoe lockers entered their view--

"......Oh."

A student happened to enter the school building. Kyousuke's group halted in their tracks.

Black twintails tied using checkered ribbons. A skinny body.

Her arms were carrying something that was wrapped.

"......Oh."

Noticing Kyousuke's group, the girl widened her eyes.

Her expression showed surprise at the unexpected reunion, then instantly turned into a smile.

" "Found you at last!" "

Kyousuke and the girl--Ayaka--spoke at the same time, their voices overlapping.

However, Ayaka's eyes were not looking at Kyousuke.

"*Kusukusu*. Found you, yes... Filthy sows."

--She was looking at Renko, Eiri and Maina. Ayaka's black eyes lost their shine while her lips became twisted in mad glee.

Instantly, Ayaka unwrapped the bundle.

Before everyone could react, she readied the object in her hands.

A rod-shaped object almost a meter long.

"Watch out, everyone!"

Renko gave a bloodcurdling scream.

Immediately, a thunderous bang shook their eardrums.

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"...Eh?"

A voice dropped amidst the silence.

With eyes widened to an unbelievable extent, Maina fell flat on her ass.

"...What's... that?"

Maina's voice was trembling. A large hole was opened up in the corridor behind her.

Within the blink of an eye, this devastation had happened at the former position of Maina's head and Eiri's chest.

In front of Maina, Eiri had pressed her back against the wall. Next to Eiri, Kyousuke was frozen and rooted to the spot. Behind him, Renko was pulling Kyousuke's hand, standing stiffly.

" " "....." " "

With stiff movements, everyone shifted their gaze from the state of the wall.

The scene before their eyes was totally surreal and absurd.

--A shotgun.

Black and brown, two colors, composed from pieces of metal.

White smoke was rising from the gun's muzzle, pointed up from recoil.

"Oh my~ What a shame, it missed. And Ayaka thought it was well-aimed."

Holding the shotgun with both hands, Ayaka pouted. Lying at her feet was the cloth used to hide the deadly weapon while a red spent cartridge was rolling there.

"......Huh?"

She had fired. Faced with the incomprehensible situation, Kyousuke's mind could not keep up.

But Ayaka smiled radiantly.

"Just endure a little while longer, okay? Onii-chan. Ayaka is rescuing you right now... By eliminating these filthy sows completely! Ayaka will rescue Onii-chan. Once this is done, Onii-chan will surely turn back into the original Onii-chan, right? You'll be able to make up with Ayaka, right?"

"A-Ayaka... What are, you talking about--"

"Whatever! Ayaka knows that Onii-chan is abnormal right now... So you won't understand. So Ayaka will first exterminate them, okay? Save the talking for later. There are eight shots left, so wait for Ayaka! --First of all, Cun-chan."

Ayaka wiped off her smile and turned to Maina, aiming with one eye.

Resting the gun snugly against her shoulder, she aimed. Ayaka's shotgun posture was well-trained to an unnatural degree.

"Eeek!?" Maina trembled intensely from fright.

Ayaka mocked Maina who was immobilized by fear.

"*Kusukusu*. How unsightly, Cun-chan... You're too afraid. Your face looks terrible, you know? But it doesn't matter. Ayaka will help eliminate it for you straight away! Together with fear, your head will be blown away, disappearing from this world!!! Let me turn you into a sticky sieve, so that even your face cannot be recognized... Aha, ahahahahahahahahhahaha... Ahaha, ahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!"

Halfway through, Ayaka could not contain her mad laughter.

This outburst of insane laughter was like a total psychopath's. Gazing at Ayaka who was laughing nonstop, Maina murmured "Ayaka-chan, wai..."

"--Why?"

Then Ayaka stopped laughing madly and instantly showed an understanding look.

Her hollow gaze did not show any emotions.

"Because, you sows--"

Ayaka lowered the shotgun and took a deep breath.

"Have soiled Onii-chaaa

"Bewitching Onii-chan with your filthy mouths... making Onii-chan abnormal. Onii-chan is clearly Ayaka's treasure... Clearly Ayaka's one and only, irreplaceable and important treasure. But you bitches used your filthy hand to touch and soil him... Blemishing him. That's why, that's why--"

After fragments of whispering, she looked up and smiled.

Stroking the shotgun, she laughed "kusukusu."

"Ayaka will eliminate you! To stop Onii-chan from getting soiled any further, Ayaka will eliminate you... from Ayaka and Onii-chan's world."

Making her declaration, she went back to a serious expression and readied the shotgun.

Her dark eyes of emptiness captured the same target as the gun.

"Eeek..." Maina held her breath.

The sights were aimed at Maina's forehead. Ayaka was just about to press the trigger when...

"Hold it, hold it right there!"

Instantly, a figure rushed in between Maina and the shotgun.

Confronted with the person standing in front of her with outspread arms, Ayaka frowned deeply.

"...Don't get in the way, Onii-chan."

"What are you doing?"

"Eh?"

"What are you doing!?"

Ignoring Ayaka, Kyousuke questioned forcefully.

"...Muu." Ayaka pouted and took her face away from the gun.

"Ayaka just said already! These bitches will soil Onii-chan. So they have to be killed and eliminated. Then Onii-chan doesn't need to be worried about getting contaminated, right?"

"That's not what I'm asking!"

"......!?"

Getting yelled at, Ayaka was intimidated.

Just as Ayaka murmured "Y-Yelling at Ayaka again..." and was about to cry, Kyousuke took a step towards her.

"...Didn't you say you didn't want to do this kind of thing, that you don't want to kill people again? Didn't you say that killing is scary and you hated it! Were those all lies!?"

"Not lies. Ayaka doesn't lie!"

"Then why--"

"...Onii-chan, Ayaka doesn't like killing. Ayaka is also scared of killing and hates killing, okay? But in this world, there are times when you must do things no matter how unwilling you are! Now is the time for Ayaka. Those sows must be killed no matter what and they're right in front of Ayaka's eyes!"

"Sows... Do... you really hate them that much!?"

"They soiled Onii-chan."

"Huh? What the fuck are you going on and on about...? I'm totally not soiled at all."

"No. You're soiled."

"...Where?"

"Right there."

"Where the fuck is that!?"

Kyousuke ruffled his hair violently. Right now, the two of them were separated by ten meters or so only. Ayaka did not have the shotgun aimed yet. Kyousuke was hesitating whether he should make a move.

Kyousuke wanted to convince her with words but he totally could not understand what his precious Ayaka's brain was thinking about.

Feeling deeply regretful about this, Kyousuke gnashed his teeth.

Ayaka sighed deeply.

"Sigh~~ Yes, it's really no good. You haven't noticed you're sick, sick to the very core... This is very bad. The root of the sickness needs to be eliminated as quickly as possible. There's not a moment to spare! So, Onii-chan--Move aside?"

"....."

"Huh? Didn't you hear Ayaka? Move aside."

"Ayaka--"

"Cut the crap, MOVE ASIII

Lowering the barrel after the recoil-operated reloading, Ayaka cocked her head.

"...Hey. Why won't you listen to Ayaka? Onii-chan is not standing on Ayaka's side anymore? You're giving up on treatment no matter what? Hey, why?"

Without looking at the cracked window at all, Ayaka stared straight at Kyousuke.

There was no light in her eyes.

The pitch-black eyes reminded Kyousuke of insect eyes, reflecting everything, rejecting everything.

The one who used to stand closest to him was now unreachably far.

"Sob sob... So weird. So weird. Ayaka is already begging Onii-chan like this, but why... Why won't you listen to Ayaka? Onii-chan won't accept Ayaka's good intentions? Sob sob sob... You're soiled, just as thought. Your body and soul are poisoned, deceived by those bitches... Sob sob sob. Absolutely, unforgivable..."

Ayaka muttered quietly, gnashing her teeth. Feeling an utter sense of loss, Kyousuke felt an emotion surge in his heart without any temperature at all, fear.

The feeling he felt for only an instant on the first day she transferred was now surging nonstop like blood from a fatal wound. Unable to withstand the terrible chill assaulting his entire body, Kyousuke trembled all over.

"Ayaka... What's with you..."

Has the excessive overreaction to this environment filled with murderers pushed Ayaka this far? For the sake of seeing Kyousuke, Ayaka had forced herself to kill people in the first place.

The instant she transferred into this school, Ayaka's mental state was already at a critical point...

"......No."

A sense of dissonance flashed. Kyousuke remembered.

In this abnormal environment, had Ayaka ever said a single word about feeling unsettled?

Had she ever expressed fear towards these abnormal students?

--No. It felt like Ayaka would only throw tantrums and act willfully when Renko and the girls were involved. The same applied for now.

Because these girls, Renko, Eiri and Maina were hanging around Kyousuke--

"...No way."

Thinking here, Kyousuke finally realized.

What made Ayaka overreact was neither the abnormal environment nor the abnormal people.

It was only directed towards *members of the opposite sex* whom Kyousuke was close with.

"What made you like this was--"

"AHHH

"Oh, sure."

"".....Eh?"

"Rather than letting you kill others, it's better for me to die instead. Please... Please calm down, Ayaka. If you kill anyone, I'll definitely break down. Because you are my precious... You're the most important person in the world!"

"------"

Kyousuke pleaded desperately, causing Ayaka to helplessly put down the shotgun.

Her half-open lips whispered "Onii-chan..."

Finally managing to get his feelings across, Kyousuke smiled, relieved.

"...Yeah, so that's that."

Ayaka smiled at Kyousuke as though responding.

However, that smile conveyed neither relief nor joy, but resignation.

"So that's the way it is... Already soiled to this extent... Hmm, Ayaka understands. Ayaka will listen to Onii-chan and not kill these people. Instead--"

Ayaka readied the lowered shotgun.

Captured within the gun's sights and her eyes was...

"*Ayaka will kill Onii-chan, okay*?"

--Kyousuke.

Targetting him between the eyes, she made eye contact with him, speaking with a sweet voice:

"Ayaka will kill Onii-chan first then commit suicide... If those sows can't be eliminated, let Onii-chan and Ayaka disappear instead? Then it'll become a world

for two people. No one will interfere, no one will soil Onii-chan. *Kusukusu*... This is a great idea. Don't you agree, Onii-chan? Let's escape this world with Ayaka, just the two of us! In that world, we'll be together forever."

"...Aya... ka."

While delivering these words, she pressed the trigger without hesitation.

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A gunshot accompanied. Without misfiring, the shot struck Kyousuke squarely between the eyes, splattering blood and brains all over the place--Just before that could happen...

"Kyousuke!"

Eiri instantly reacted and pushed him down.

The shot passed through and devastated the spot where Kyousuke's head was an instant earlier. Collapsing to the ground, Maina clutched her head, going "Eek!?" while her back hit the floor.

"Uwahhhhhhhhhhh!"

Renko roared and jumped.

Charging at Ayaka, she tried to close the distance.

"Don't get in the way!!!"

But Renko only made it halfway when Ayaka already finished reloading.

Aiming at Renko, Ayaka squeezed the trigger.

Another gunshot erupted.

"Kyah!?"

Renko pounced diagonally forward to evade the incoming shot, adjusting her posture directly without controlling the momentum of her running, she closed in on Ayaka.

The shot blew up the linoleum floor, leaving gunshot marks in the corridor.

"...Ku! So annoying!"

Despite getting surprised by Renko's agility, Ayaka continued to act quickly. By the time they were only two meters apart, she had the gun ready and aimed at Renko already.

"Shuko!?"

Intending to jump, Renko was intimidated and froze.

Ayaka's grinning lips twisted as she pressed the trigger, intending to blow Renko's head away.

" "......!?" "

But the shot did not fire.

--Jammed. Ayaka frantically tried to remove the spent shell that had failed to eject.

"Hunshuko!"

"Kuu!?"

At this moment, Renko landed a body slam on Ayaka, making her lose balance and falling to the ground.

" "...Ah!?" "

The shotgun left her hand, sliding on the floor.

Renko immediately chased after it.

"You're not succeeding!"

"Uhyaaa!?"

Ayaka tackled her from behind, dragging her down.

The girls wrestled each other on the ground. When their rolling stopped, Ayaka was on top.

"Don't get in Ayaka's way, sow!!!!"

Ayaka slapped Renko in the face with her right hand.

"Guh... No! I'll obstruct as many times as it'll take!"

Renko refused forcefully, relentless.

Renko turned her face forward again, staring at Ayaka and vented directly:

"I'm not going to let you kill Kyousuke just because you decide on your own to suffer persecution mania! If you must kill no matter what, kill me first! Use every way you can to kill--Guho!"

Without waiting for Renko to finish, Ayaka swung her left hand.

Seeing the side of the face turned away by the slap, Ayaka said viciously:

"Excellent, Mask... Ayaka will give you what you want and kill you! A sinner like you will go to hell and won't go to the same place as Ayaka and Onii-chan!"

"What nonsense are you spouting? You're going to hell too if you kill me! But Kyousuke will go to heaven! Even if you die together, you won't end up in the same place after death! Too bad, even in the afterlife...!"

"Ku... S-Shut up! You're being noisy!!! Clearly you're just a filthy sow!!!"

Turning red in the face, Ayaka swung her right fist.

Then Renko turned her head to evade as though she had been waiting for this very instant.

"Ah--"

The missed fist struck the ground.

Renko's right fist smashed into Ayaka's surprised face.

"...Pu!?"

Suffering retaliation, Ayaka became afraid.

Instantly, Renko's upper body bounced up.

"You're the sow!!"

Pouncing on Ayaka, she reversed their positions. This time, Renko was riding on top of Ayaka.

Grabbing the front of Ayaka's shirt with one hand, Renko pulled her face up close.

"Don't start thinking of killing just when the slightest thing doesn't go your way! How selfish are you!? If you want to be willful, offer your body first! But your frail body probably can't do it! If I'm a pig, then you're a piece of chicken!"

"--Pufu!?"

A straight punch landed on her face.

Suffering a hit, Ayaka weeped and glared at Renko.

"...S-Shut up! You soiled Onii-chan, Ayaka won't allow you to lecture so impudently! Your tits are gonna sag, dairy cow! Holstein!"

"Yeah yeah, whatever! They're not gonna sag! It's really too bad for you, but Kyousuke loves boobs the most! What do you understand about Kyousuke!?"

"You're the one who doesn't understand Onii-chan! Onii-chan doesn't love oversized boobs, he loves beautiful boobs! Can you stop acting like you know everything!? Bulging this much is totally not good, okay!?"

Ayaka grabbed Renko's breasts with both hands.

"Shuko!?" Just as Renko hesitated, Ayaka landed a headbutt on her. Although Renko was blown back, Ayaka grabbed the limiter. Pulling the mask, she punched.

"Ayaka understands! Ayaka understands very clearly! Ayaka understands Onii-chan's matters more than anyone!!! You... You extra who just met Onii-chan recently, Ayaka won't lose to you! How could Ayaka possibly lose to you!!! Die! Die die die, die!!!"

Violently, she struck with her left and right repeatedly.

Every time she punched, Renko would stare straight into Ayaka's face and cry hoarsely:

"You understand!? You really--Pu!? You really understand Kyousuke!? I don't think so! If--Pu!? If you really understand Kyousuke, you won't be doing this--Pu!? You won't be murdering people in front of Kyousuke's eyes! --Pu!? I won't lose! A girl like you--Pu!? I'm not going to be killed by someone like you who's blind, selfish and incapable of distinguishing right from wrong!! --Pu!?"

Suffering who knew how many punches to the face, Renko did not stop speaking while Ayaka got more and more emotional. While she was swinging her arms alternately left and right, the twintails jumped randomly.

"Shut up! Shut up shut up shut up shut up shut up, shut up!!!"

"Now who's the noisy one!? Kinkinkinkinkin, so noisy!"

"Shut up, ugly!"

"You shut up, ugly personality!"

"You have no right to say that!"

"You're the one who has no right to criticize me! I'm much prettier than you!"

"...Argh, enough! Ayaka will rip your mouth apart, sow--"

"That's my line!"

Just as Ayaka was getting exhausted from all the punching, Renko pounced on her, reversing positions again. Ayaka resisted desperately and the two girls rolled on the floor in the corridor, entangled together.

Perhaps hearing the commotion, students began to gather round to watch.

"Ooh!? I was wondering what it was, so it's a catfight! Kill kill!"

"Hee, heeheehee... Two scorching bodies, entangled together, messed up clothes, panting... Hee, heehee."

"Renko!? And, isn't this Ayaka-chan!? What are you two doing!?"

"...I think they're feeding. This world is ruled by the law of the survival of the fittest. The winner will eat the loser."

"Kukuku. Chihiro is very correct... Power is everything! Power is absolute! Verily, the most powerful person shall rule this world as the Absolute Emperor--Uwahhhhhhhhh!? A shotgun! There's a shotgun on the ground here! Is it real!? Hey hey, is that a real gun!?"

Students appeared from both sides of the corridor as well as the building entrance, resulting in encirclement from three sides.

But no one intervened between the two girls.

As though about to bite, Renko and Ayaka struggled against each other, ignoring the spectating crowd.

" " "------" " "

Kyousuke, Eiri and Maina were no exception, not making a move.

Eiri continued to hold Kyousuke down, Kyousuke continued to stay held down by Eiri, Maina remained collapsed on the floor, all of them watching the two girls fight.

At the school building entrance that was packed with students, the two girls quarreled violently:

"Shuko! At least think a little about Kyousuke's feelings, okay? Ayaka-chan!"

"Ayaka always considers Onii-chan's feelings! Much much more than you!"

Now the two girls had stood up and were tugging at each other's hair.

"No, you haven't thought about Kyousuke's interests at all! You're just imposing your own ideals on him without consent, aren't you!?"

"Not imposing! Onii-chan accepts Ayaka willingly!"

"That's not accepting properly at all! You're very good at escaping reality!"

"That's because he's soiled by you bitches!"

"Like I said, this is escaping reality! Know that you've gone too far, nutcase!"

"You're the one who has gone too far, hussy!"

"What did you say!?"

"What!?"

" "Ngggggggggg..." " The two girls butted their foreheads together.

Both girls had tousled hair and rumpled uniforms. Ayaka's face was covered in bruises while Renko's mask looked like it could fall off any moment.

.....Hmm?

The gas mask was about to fall off, how?

Taking off the gas mask--the limiter--would turn Renko into an uncaged beast. The Murder Made created for the sake of killing will massacre everyone in sight without leaving any survivors.

Hence, the securing band was always locked, but...

Whenever Renko's life was in danger, the Unlimiter would activate and unlock. That device had probably activated while Renko was brawling with Ayaka.

Giving it a rough look, Kyousuke felt that Renko should not have been cornered to that degree, but it was undeniable that her gas mask was about to fall off. If that really were the case, things would be bad.

"Hey, stop it! Renko, Ayaka! Stop fighting!"

Kyousuke pushed Eiri aside and stood up, planning on rushing over to them.

--Just at this moment.

"Y-You... annoying thing!!!"

Ayaka roared, delivering a knee strike into Renko's belly.

Renko went "Shuko!?" and immediately separated from her, swaying unsteadily.

"DIII

" " "------" " "

The noise was frozen while hot air instantly turned cold.

An unidentified sense of tension scoured the surroundings.

".....Oh."

A vapid voice.

Renko turned her face towards Ayaka who had her fist readied.

"...Fufufu."

With the mask taken off, the side of Renko's face came into view.

The light-pink lips were twisted in a grin.

"What a heavy punch, jeez... Fufu. Thanks to that, the mask came off! Sigh... How are you going to compensate me, Ayaka-chan? It's starting to play. This violent melody that I've never heard before, yes~?"

"......!?"

Clear, ice-blue eyes, evocative of a glacier with absolute zero temperature.

Staring into the otherworldly beauty of that face, Ayaka was stunned for a moment.

Despite her mouth opening and closing, trying to say something, no words came out.

She simply stared wide-eyed in shock, staring at Renko's face.

The surrounding students were also rendered speechless by her suffocating sense of beauty, her mysterious true face.

Amidst the silence, a clear soprano voice was heard.

"Oya? Oya oya, fufufu... I am really too beautiful, making everyone look like they lost their soul. Oh my~ Being too beautiful really is a crime! Clearly without doing anything, I massacred everyone's hearts! Teehee. Fufu... Next, let me destroy the bodies? Destroying minds and bodies completely--"

"Ah... Oooh...
Uwahhhh

One shot, two shots, three shots in a row. Boom followed boom, then another boom.

But none of the three shots reached their target.

Not because Renko dodged but because Ayaka could not steady her aim. Presumably, Renko's extraordinary aura had shaken Ayaka completely.

After the triple firing of shots, Ayaka howled in resignation.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh, can't stand this, ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Holding up her gun, she charged straight ahead.

The two girls' distance instantly shrank.

"------"

Renko faced off against Ayaka head on, narrowing her ice-blue eyes.

Pointing the muzzle at Renko, Ayaka gnashed her teeth.

In that instant, Renko lowered her stance slightly.

Then immediately--

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A nervous silence descended.

Everyone gulped, their eyes glued to the scene before them.

"...What's the matter, Ayaka-chan?"

Her beautiful face twisted in a grin, Renko asked coldly.

White and sharp canines could be seen between her soft lips.

"Better be quick if you're going to kill me."

Pressed against her forehead was the muzzle.

The gun was shaking slightly, trembling. Panicking breathing could be heard.

"Hoo~, hoo~.... Hooooooo!"

Ayaka adjusted her shotgun's stance in both hands, gritting her teeth. Her eyes were bloodshot, index finger on the trigger, she glared viciously at those ice-blue eyes.

However, Renko shrugged with full composure and aloofness.

"Just like the previous eight shots, just squeeze lightly with your finger. Very easy, right? Even if it's me, I should die with one shot at this range. But if you miss, that's a different matter."

"......Kill you."

"Yes. If you find me in the way and hate me very much, just kill me."

"...Kill you! Kill you kill you kill you kill you kill you, kill you!"

"I said go ahead. Just running your mouth isn't going to kill me. Do you really want to kill me?"

"S-So noisy! Shut up! If you say so, Ayaka will give you your wish--"

"Stop!"

Instantly, Kyousuke yelled out.

Supporting himself against his knees that were about to collapse, he pleaded:

"Stop it, Ayaka... Don't kill Renko... Please."

"Onii-chan--"

Ayaka narrowed her eyes, staring at the pleading Kyousuke.

Her eyes of darkness remained unmoved, not even showing a single spark.

"Hoo, you do care very much after all."

"Care? Of course I care."

"...That's true. Onii-chan has been poisoned. Then it doesn't matter. Ayaka will kill. After killing Mask, Ayaka will then kill Onii-chan, then commit suicide... *Kusukusu*. Yes. Ayaka must kill quickly. This time, Ayaka will aim carefully right between the eyes--"

"The one I care about is you, Ayaka!"

As Ayaka was about to turn back to Renko, Kyousuke vented the feelings in his heart.

"I don't want you to kill people exactly because I care about you! But in spite of that, you want to kill my friends... Maybe you're jealous of Renko and the others, but in my heart, Ayaka, you're irreplaceable family! A one and only existence! I treasure you so much but... If you kill people for such reasons, I'll... I'll--"

"Hey, Ayaka-chan..."

Staring at the side of Ayaka's face, Renko asked:

"...Can't you feel it at all?"

Ayaka's eyebrows knitted together in surprise as she stared at Renko.

"What? After killing you, what else--"

"Not this. I'm talking about Kyousuke. Kyousuke is suffering a lot... He's very sad, in great sorrow, isn't he? Forced to make that kind of face towards his treasured family, haven't you thought about that at all?"

"......Hmm."

Although Ayaka fell silent for a moment, the flames of wrath immediately lit up in her eyes.

"You bitches are the ones who made Onii-chan suffer! You soiled Onii-chan.. It's all your fault! If it weren't for you bitches, Ayaka wouldn't need to do this at all! Then Onii-chan wouldn't need to face Ayaka with that kind of look... It's not Ayaka's fault, it's all your fault!!!"

Screaming shrilly, she then panted.

After waiting for Ayaka's breathing to calm down, Renko slowly started to speak.

"--To start off, I'll be blunt, Ayaka-chan."

Her lips twisted in a grin.

Her canines glinting like daggers, she revealed a savage smile.

"I can kill you any time, you know? Breaking your arm faster than you can pull the trigger, blowing your head off faster than the bullet can hit me... Fufu. A few seconds is all I need for a human like you. I don't need a murder weapon, there's no need. I can dismember you with my bare hands, shredding your corpse into a million pieces, you know?"

While her wide-open eyes glittered, Renko stuck her tongue out.

"...Ooh." Intimidated by Renko, Ayaka cowered and huddled.

"But I won't kill you. Do you know why?"

"W-Who knows what you're thinking! What does this have to do with--"

"Because Kyousuke will be sad."

Declaring that, Renko's eyes were very gentle.

Or perhaps, during the cooking practical, under her mask, Renko might have been showing the same expression when watching Kyousuke eat Ayaka's cooking.

"......!?"

Ayaka stared with her eyes wide open.

Staring into those eyes with upfront honesty, Renko continued:

"Because I love Kyousuke, I'll do everything I can to avoid making him sad. For my beloved Kyousuke, I will suppress my killing intent no matter how strong it is. Suppressing jealousy, suppressing unease, suppressing willfulness, suppressing my purpose of existence. Suppressing the proof of my existence. Even if suppression is impossible, I will still suppress them all, just you watch!"

"Wha..."

Confronted with words that were as honest as that gaze, Ayaka was rendered speechless.

Renko narrowed her ice-blue eyes and asked:

"--Then what about you, Ayaka-chan? For Kyousuke's sake, are you able to suppress your own emotions? Are your feelings for Kyousuke only this shallow?"

"...S-Shut up."

"In the end, you only care about yourself the most. Kyousuke is not the center of your considerations! Taking advantage of 'poisoned' and 'soiled' as excuses, you are simply looking for reasons to justify prioritizing your own feelings, aren't you!?"

"...Shut up."

"Oh my oh my. What a sore loser you are, Ayaka-chan. The most precious person in this world to you is you yourself, not Kyousuke. Yes. I won too easily. So easy that I want to laugh! Fufufu. I have absolutely no interest in killing you who are unable to suppress your own intent to kill. Oh my oh my, what's the matter? Just try killing me, okay!? Ahaha!"

"SHUT UP!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Roaring hysterically, Ayaka readied the shotgun again.

Her bloodshot eyes were widened to their limits.

Pressed against Renko's forehead, the gun's muzzle kept trembling.

"Kill you... Kill you kill you kill you

She cried and covered her face with her hands.

Fragmentary speech came from her mouth while she sobbed:

"Ayaka, loves Onii-chan... level of loving Onii-chan, definitely does not lose to Mask! Love, love, don't wanna hand him over to anyone... because Onii-chan is Ayaka's treasure... Because in this world, Onii-chan is the only family Ayaka can trust!"

Roaring out her thoughts and feelings for Kyousuke, she cried out.

"Ayaka doesn't want Onii-chan to be stolen by Mask, Dummy-Bane-san and Cun-chan... Ayaka absolutely won't let you steal Onii-chan! If Onii-chan leaves Ayaka, Ayaka will become all alone... Ayaka doesn't want that. Ayaka cannot tolerate... Ayaka has nothing but Onii-chan... Sob sob. Don't leave Ayaka alone, Onii-chan..."

"A-Ayaka--"

"It's okay, Ayaka-chan."

Without waiting for Kyousuke to rush over, Renko knelt down.

Placing her hand on Ayaka's head, she went "good girl, good girl" and caressed.

"You love Kyousuke and Kyousuke loves you too. You siblings love each other. Is this relationship that easy to destroy? Is this bond that easy to tear apart if outsiders like us tried to interfere, Ayaka-chan?"

"Of course not, how could it be that easy!?"

Ayaka looked up forcefully, staring at Renko.

Renko nodded with satisfaction, smiling.

"Yes. So don't worry. Also, I'm not trying to steal Kyousuke away from you. Rather, I'm trying to enter you two's world."

"......Hmm."

"Of course, saying that is too early. We just met, so until I win your trust, I will try my best! I like you. To be honest, in the beginning I only wanted to make friends with you because you're 'Kyousuke's sister', but... Rather, girls who love the same person tend to be more compatible? By the time I noticed, I no longer thought as I did in the beginning, simply wanting to get along with you purely as friends, Ayaka-chan."

"------"

Ayaka looked down again.

She bit her lip.

"U-Umm... So I guess it's no good after all? You don't want to get along with a murderer like me? Actually, I still want to kill you right now, the feeling is so strong... I haven't killed you because I don't want to make Kyousuke sad, but be patient, once I kill Kyousuke, I'll also dismember... you together."

"......matter."

"Hmm?"

"Whether you're a murderer or not, it doesn't matter! To Ayaka, 99% of the world is utterly worthless trash... Ayaka doesn't care about those people. Can't be bothered. If they get in the way, Ayaka will just eliminate them. No feelings at all about this. Eliminating trash does not arouse hate or guilt. Not even the slightest... bit."

"...Is that so?"

"However."

Ayaka looked at her right hand.

Her eyes wavered, feeling troubled.

"--Couldn't shoot."

She stared straight at the finger that had been placed on the trigger just now.

"Ayaka was unable to kill Mask... When the thought of Mask dying, disappearing from this world... crossed Ayaka's mind, Ayaka's chest suddenly hurt so much. Touring the school building together, running away from the upperclassmen together, studying together, the cooking practical, lots of things came to mind..."

"Ayaka-chan..."

"Ayaka feels very very angry. Why can't Ayaka do it? Nothing more than disposing of a piece of trash, why hesitate so indecisively...? But Ayaka understands now."

Looking up, Ayaka stared at Renko.

"Ayaka did not stop because Onii-chan won't like it. Ayaka stopped because Ayaka didn't want it. To Ayaka, Mask is--"

Her relaxed cheeks reddened as she said:

"Renko-san is no longer simple trash."

"------"

Hearing Ayaka, Renko fell silent.

"U-Umm... Renko-san?" Ayaka frowned then immediately...

"U-Ugahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?"

Clutching her head, Renko screamed and started rolling on the floor.

"Kyah!? What's wrong, Renko-sa--"

"Don't come any closer!"

Renko stopped Ayaka from approaching, smashing her own forehead repeatedly against the floor.

"Oh, this is bad... This killing intent is really bad!!! Super high-speed sweep-picking combined with gravity blast, the torrent from the seven-stringed bass is piercing me like a drill--Ahhhhhhhhhhh, intense! Too intense!!! R-Really wanna kill... Wanna kill wanna kill wanna kill wanna kill wanna kill wanna kill wanna kill wanna kill wanna kill wanna kill wanna kill wanna kill wanna kill wanna kill wanna kill, really wanna kill!!! Such wonderful tech-death! Uncontrollable... The rampaging killing intent is uncontrollable!!!!"

"Renko!? Wait, I'm getting the gas mask--"

In front of the stunned Ayaka and the surrounding spectators who were unaware of what was going on, Kyousuke put the limiter on Renko.

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"...You really disappoint me, Kamiya the younger."

An hour or two had passed since Ayaka's shooting commotion. Kyousuke and his group had been brought to Kurumiya's "office" located in the new school building. Standing arrogantly on the black lacquer office desk, Kurmiya was blowing blue smoke at the face of the middle person out of the five students standing in a row, in other words, Ayaka.

Ayaka coughed and glared sharply.

"What do you mean by disappoint, Kurumiya-sensei...? You're the one who gave Ayaka the gun, right?"

"Exactly."

"Exactly... The fuck!"

Kyousuke yelled loudly at Kurumiya who had admitted the fact readily.

He had already guessed partially that Kurumiya was exactly the one who had lent the shotgun to Ayaka.

Kyousuke and his friends had failed to find Ayaka anywhere in the school building because Kurumiya had hidden her away. While Kyousuke and the other were attending class, she had sent Ayaka to the "shooting range" at the new school building to receive firearms instruction from a teacher called Miduchi.

The mastermind, Kurumiya, shrugged.

"What disappoints me is not the fact that you caused an incident. Rather, it's the fact that you failed to kill a single person, retard. Eight shots fired, all of them missed. Incompetence should have limits! Failing once, sure, but failing the make up exams as well? Stop screwing around."

"You're the one who's fucking screwing around, aren't ya!?"

Kyousuke leaned forward and grabbed Kurumiya by the collar.

"What the fuck did you make my sister do, you fucking sadist hag! Imma gonna kill you!"

However, Kurumiya reacted with delight.

"Wow, you finally show some intent to kill! I'm so happy, Kamiya. Well then, I shall have to give Kamiya the younger some good loving from now on. When you see your precious getting brutally abused, you're not going to stay normal, will you, asshole? Kukuku... Just as I thought, enrolling the younger sister was the right decision."

"Ku!? Y-You bitch--"

What suddenly chilled Kyousuke's almost boiling mind was the last sentence that Kurumiya had let slip.

--Enrolling the younger sister. That meant allowing Ayaka to enroll in spite of the murder that was merely *attempted*. Or perhaps...

"...Before she enrolled, you're the fucker who handed the shotgun to Ayaka, aren't you? Kurumiya."

"It wasn't me."

"Huh? Then who's the bastard--"

"Of course it's the courier who made the home delivery. I sent the package but I'm not the one who handed it to your sister. It's not like I need to hand the gun to her personally, right?"

"What kind of fucking logic is that!?"

"Quiet."

Kurumiya extinguished her cigarette on Kyousuke's forehead.

"...Why are you getting angry, asshole? You should be thanking me. Thanks to me for sending your sister a defective gun, she was able to enroll here without killing anyone."

"Ah!? What kind of fucking joke is that!? If you hadn't given the gun to Ayaka--"

"Inevitable. Your sister murdering someone was inevitable."

".....Huh?"

"I gave her nothing more than a push. Even without a gun, she could have used a sharp object, even without a sharp object, she could have used a blunt object, even without a blunt object, she could have used her hands... As long as she's chasing after you, she would have murdered somehow. Like this time, even if I hadn't interfered on purpose, Kamiya the younger would still have wanted to eliminate Renko and the other girls. --Am I right, Kamiya the younger?"

"....."

Faced with Kurumiya's question, Ayaka stayed silent. She neither admitted nor denied it.

Turning her eyes away defiantly, her thoughts were completely written on her face.

"Despite being a virgin killer, Kamiya the younger is a true psychopath. Because she feels absolutely nothing about killing. Without you asshole as a limiter for her, she can easily cross that line. Also, the one who warped her sense of morals... was also you, Kamiya."

--Unable to refute her.

Kyousuke was also starting to understand vaguely.

Kyousuke's method for rescuing Ayaka from the bullying incident was too forceful, causing Ayaka's world to narrow. Her prioritized relationship led to her

abnormal obsession. Excessively intense love caused her sense of morals to become twisted.

The fists he had swung originally to rescue Ayaka had caused her to fall. The fists he had swung repeatedly to protect Ayaka had ended up causing Ayaka to fall ever deeper into darkness...

Hence, Kyousuke could not hold Ayaka responsible.

Since Kyousuke was the root cause compelling Ayaka to murder, the one who should be held responsible would be undoubtedly be Kyousuke himself--

"No. Onii-chan did no wrong."

At this moment, Ayaka spoke forcefully.

Placing her hand on her chest, Ayaka reminisced.

"It was Onii-chan who rescued Ayaka. Not just that one time... Onii-chan saved Ayaka countless, countless times, always protecting Ayaka. Without Onii-chan, Ayaka might be gone from this world already. So, Onii-chan doesn't need to blame yourself. Don't apologize. Don't feel that rescuing Ayaka was wrong... Ayaka is the one who's wrong. Ayaka was too spoilt. Sorry, Onii-chan."

"Ayaka..."

"......Tsk."

Kurumiya secretly clicked her tongue and leaned against the back of her chair.

"Sigh, how boring. Boring boring, absolutely boring! Go act out your heartwarming drama somewhere else. Enough from you all, just disappear from my sight now. I'll be lenient this time."

"...What leniency? It's totally all your doing in the first place."

"You're being noisy, Dummy-Bane."

"......Shut up."

Cursing, Eiri left the office. "Awawa." Maina followed closely behind her.

Just as Kyousuke and the rest were about to leave...

"Oh by the way, Kamiya. The conditions for you to graduate, brat--that will include your sister now."

Kurumiya informed Kyousuke.

"If Kamiya the younger also reaches graduation without killing a single person, without being killed by anyone, I will let you graduate properly. As a side note, I've already told your sister about this school's true purpose, so there's no need for you to explain, okay?"

"...That's really a great help. That suits me just fine."

"Yes! For Onii-chan's sake, Ayaka will do her best too!"

"Kukuku. Struggle as hard you can, siblings. As for you, Murder Made--"

Kurumiya stopped smiling and narrowed her eyes at Renko.

For a while, Kurumiya stared at Renko's gas mask.

"...No, nothing. You get the fuck out as well."

"Foosh."

Renko only laughed in response. Without saying anything, she turned heels and left.

Remaining last, Kyousuke took Ayaka's hand and walked, exiting the room.

Just as they were leaving, Kyousuke saw Kurumiya just as the door closed.

"--Die in a ditch."

Her face twisting in resentment, she started operating her cellphone.

Review - Outroduction

"Ayaka is so disappointed with Kurumiya-sensei!"

As soon as they left the office, Ayaka's anger exploded.

"Ayaka never thought she was such a villainous schemer... Onii-chan was completely right. Kurumiya-sensei is not a good teacher. She's trying to make Onii-chan and Ayaka fall then cultivate us as killers, a bad teacher! That shorty is rotted to the core."

"Hey... 'Shorty' is a taboo word, you know? Don't say it. If she hears it--"

"Shorty! Short, shorty, shorty shorty! Kurumiya-sensei is a shorty!!!"

"I told you to stop!"

Covering up Ayaka's mouth as she began to yell, Kyousuke moved away from the office together with the rest of the group.

"But she is a shorty, you know?"

"Although she's a shorty, you can't yell it so casually."

Kyousuke sighed and scratched the back of his head.

"If you attack indiscriminately in a wide area like this, you're just shooting yourself in the foot, you know? Just like how I was rampaging around without caring who I messed with, those people from the underbelly of society targeted me."

"...Muu. Ayaka can pick carefully, okay?"

"Really?"

"Yes."

"But you picked wrong with Kurumiya-sensei."

"T-That can't be helped..."

"Conversely, you opposed Renko, who turned out to be a good person."

While Ayaka remained silent, Kyousuke continued:

"Before treating someone as an enemy, you should try to understand them more first, right? Don't just reject people directly without even looking. Even things you recognize as rubbish and thrown away, there could be real treasures among them, you know? If that turned out to be the case, it'd be a real shame."

"....."

Ayaka hung her head and clenched her fist. Her lips were pursed tightly.

"Dummy-Bane-san! Cun-chan!"

Suddenly called loudly, Eiri and Maina looked at Ayaka.

"...What?"

"...W-What's the matter...?"

Leaning against a wall, Eiri frowned while Maina asked in trepidation.

Ayaka looked up and while they watched...

"Sorry!" She took a bow.

"Ayaka said many mean things and did many mean things, sorry. No matter how much Dummy-Bane-san angered Ayaka and made Ayaka repulsed on a biological level, Ayaka still went too far. No matter how much Cun-chan's cunning annoyed Ayaka, Ayaka still went too far. Ayaka is reflecting, so very sorry!"

"Umm, you're... trying to apologize to us?"

"P-Probably... Looks like it to me."

While the two girls looked at each other, Ayaka ignored their reaction and continued:

"...Ayaka realized. Ayaka's unease was because Ayaka did not trust others. Ayaka trusts Onii-chan! So Ayaka won't worry about 'Onii-chan getting stolen' anymore. So--"

Ayaka looked up at Eiri and Maina.

"Ayaka will trust the people Onii-chan trusts. So, umm... Akabane-san, Igarashi-san! Could you be friends with... Ayaka?"

" "-------" "

Silence descended. Soon after, a light sigh came out.

"...Sigh. Whatever. Could you not call me Akabane-san?"

"Eh? H-Huh...? Akabane--no, Dummy-Bane-san is angry?"

"I'm not angry. I've already experienced harsh attitudes from my little sister at home, so I'm long used to being treated badly. However--"

Still keeping her face turned away, Eiri glanced with narrowed eyes.

"Can you stop calling me Dummy-Bane-san? Although it's slightly better than my family name, it's still infuriating... Just Eiri is fine. If you'll fix that, let's call things even from now on."

"Oh, umm... E-Eiri-san?"

"Yes, that's fine."

The corners of Eiri's lips moved to produce a gentle smile. Gazing at the side of her face, Ayaka repeated "Eiri-san..." to confirm.

"Umm!" As Ayaka felt contented, Maina spoke up.

"I want to be good friends with you too, Ayaka-chan! Although you scared me when you wanted to kill me, but it goes both ways. If you don't mind me being stupid and dangerous, let's be fiends! Awwww... Bit my tongue again."

"Igarashi-san... That was on purpose, right?"

"Eh!? O-Of course not!"

"Hmm~? You didn't bite yourself this time... So suspicious. Cun-chan really is Cun-chan, still suspicious for being cunning."

"Ehhh? W-Why did this happen... Auau."

"...Don't mind it, Cun-chan."

"Even you, Eiri-chan!?"

Ayaka laughed "kusukusu" after seeing Maina surprised to be teased.

Watching their interactions, Renko also laughed "foosh."

"Looks like they seem to have made up. Yeah... Congrats congrats congrats! By the way, Ayaka-chan, this is actually my situation--"

"...Hmm."

Renko switched to serious mode while Ayaka's face went stiff.

Then Renko began to narrate. How she was the killer born for the sake of murdering, how she had made over three digits worth of kills as part of experiments, how all her emotions were connected to the act of *murder*, how the gas mask was the limiter used to control her excessive killing impulse. Finally,

there was the fact that she would start wanting to kill Kyousuke as soon as Kyousuke reciprocated her feelings and ended her one-sided love...

"------"

After listening to Renko's story, Ayaka bowed her head, silent.

In the shadows of her bangs, her face could not be seen clearly.

"Oh... S-Sorry! Because my true identity is secret, I couldn't tell you earlier. Umm, well, umm... Sorry. I love Kyousuke, so I want Kyousuke to reconsider his feelings, but after Kyousuke reconsiders his feelings, I might end up killing Kyousuke, umm... S-Sorry! I never thought of taking Kyousuke away from your side, okay? When I kill Kyousuke, I'll kill you together, Ayaka-chan! Then you two can be together in the other world just as you said! C-Congrats congrats congrats..."

"Yeah right."

Ignoring Kyousuke's retort, Renko felt like she was sitting on a pincushoin.

Ayaka slowly looked up at Renko who was still searching for words.

"Please endure."

Smiling radiantly, Ayaka said that.

"Renko-san, you said it yourself, right? 'For my beloved Kyousuke, I will suppress my killing intent no matter how strong it is.' In that case, even if your feelings become mutual, please continue to suppress it. Not Onii-chan, but your killing intent."

"Ehhhh!? No, I did say that... But the stronger my feelings, the stronger my killing intent, you know? Without the mask, it will keep sounding nonstop, you know!?"

"Ayaka doesn't care. What, you're backing down now...? Renko-san, aren't you suppressing your killing intent for Onii-chan? Are your feelings for Onii-chan only so shallow?"

"Shuko!? W-Well..."

"Sigh, in the end, you only care about yourself the most, Renko-san. Taking advantage of various reasons as excuses, you are simply looking for reasons to justify prioritizing your own feelings, aren't you? *Kusukusu*."

"No! I care about Kyousuke more than anything else, more than anyone else..."

"Yes. In that case, you'll definitely be able to endure!"

"------"

Ayaka was probably taking revenge for earlier. Watching the smiling Ayaka, Renko could not find words to reply.

"Ooooh... F-Fair enough. If I'm really doing it for Kyousuke, I have to endure. Ayaka-chan is right... Ooooh. W-What...? In that case, even if my feelings are reciprocated, I still won't get any satisfaction out of it? --Ah!? But but! If Kyousuke starts getting 'want to get killed' feelings towards me, it'll be okay for me to kill Kyousuke, right?"

"...How can it be okay?"

"Yes! When the time comes, send Ayaka along as well? Ayaka doesn't want to separate from Onii-chan. Ayaka doesn't mind getting killed as long as it's by Renko-san... Just kidding! Ehehe."

"...How can it be okay?"

Faced with his sister's shy smile, Kyousuke only felt dizzy.

"Foosh!" Renko hugged Ayaka, overjoyed.

"Ayaka-chan! I will do my best... I will do my best! I will make Kyousuke fall in love with me, then hold my killing intent back... I'll make him fall head over heels until he's willing to offer his life to me!"

"Okay. Then there's no choice, Ayaka agrees with Renko-san. Renko-san taught Ayaka many many things... Ayaka will repay her debt. I-It's not like Ayaka acknowledges Renko-san because Ayaka loves Renko-san, okay!?"

Feeling deeply conflicted, Kyousuke looked at the two girls who were playing around.

...To be honest, there was still a whole ton of issues.

Ayaka still seemed the same as always, feeling nothing about killing people. There was almost no change in her fundamental mindset and values.

But even so--

"Ayaka-chuwa~n!"

"Owww!? Your mask hit Ayaka! Please don't push with anything but your boobs! Besides, what if you take it off? It must be getting in the way all the time, what a waste. Think about it, I'm sure Onii-chan wants you to take it off!"

"Ah, yes. That's indeed the case! Then I'll take it off. I agree that it's more convenient. In this time of the year, it's like being steamed in a pot..."

"Y-Yes, hurry and take it off! Renko-san, you'll definitely be fine."

"Foosh. That's right, after all, they won't sag or get deformed! Then I won't hold back--"

"Why are you stripping!!!!?"

"Didn't you just ask me to take it off?"

"Ayaka was talking about the gas mask! Not your bra!"

"Shuko... What, you're talking about the mask? You're really ambiguous, you know..."

"Your brain is what's ambiguous! Are you a slut!? You really are a slut after all!?"

"There, there. Here's a gift for you, don't be angry."

"Don't want it."

Ayaka swatted Renko's bra, sending it to the floor and glaring at Renko.

Eiri yawned while Maina smiled with admiration, going "Ahaha, they're getting along so well."

Seeing their interaction, Kyousuke could feel that the future no longer seemed all dark and bleak.

After experiencing this commotion, although very weakly, Ayaka's world had expanded indeed. Also, it was Ayaka herself who opened up this part of her world. In that case, she was surely capable of changing.

Just changing gradually would be enough.

It would be tough if Kyousuke were alone, but he had Eiri, Maina and Renko cheering for him.

In fact, the one who had stopped Ayaka during the incident was Renko, not Kyousuke.

"...I really don't know anything at all."

His little sister, the person the most intimate with him, the person the most important to him... Kyousuke had never understood her. This fact caused blunt pain to radiate from Kyousuke's heart.

Ayaka had said: *Ayaka was too spoilt*.

Kyousuke felt that perhaps the same applied to himself too.

Living for Ayaka all this time, similarly, Kyousuke--

"...This must change."

"Hmm? What's the matter, Kyousuke? You look unhappy."

Renko asked Kyousuke while he was muttering to himself.

"Aha." Deciding on her own, she extended her right hand towards Kyousuke.

"I guess you want this. Okay, here you go!"

Held in her hand was the article of underwear she had removed just now. Kyousuke wondered whether the reason why the bra was very mature in style and made of black lace rather than the school's prescribed design was because her cup size was unusually high.

His gaze fleeing from the bra, Kyousuke pushed Renko back.

"I don't want it, idiot... Seriously, you just love messing around."

"...? Kyousuke, why is your face red?"

"Shut up. Hurry and put it back on properly."

Throwing these words out, he turned his face away. His heart was pounding in his chest.

Having experienced many seduction attempts before already, Kyousuke no longer reacted that strongly to the sight of underwear. However, the pulsation he felt just now was different from that kind--

"Onii-chan."

Feeling a tugging at his shirt hem, Kyousuke came back to his senses.

Tiptoeing, Ayaka brought her lips near Kyousuke's ear and whispered:

"...Ayaka will support Onii-chan."

Kyousuke's heart jumped violently.

It was obvious what Ayaka meant by "support."

Precisely because of that, Kyousuke felt very awkward.

"Support me... You..."

"Yes, Ayaka will support Onii-chan. Because Onii-chan is Ayaka's important family. Ayaka wants to give Onii-chan happiness, Ayaka wants Onii-chan to receive happiness. So, Onii-chan must find a wonderful partner, okay? As the younger sister, Ayaka is bound by duty to help. In order not to let Onii-chan get deceived by bad women, Ayaka will keep her eyes open and judge carefully to support Onii-chan... Ayaka swears that Ayaka will not get in the way of Onii-chan's road to love. Ayaka will cheer for Onii-chan! Fufufu."

"Oh..."

Finishing her declaration in her whispering voice, Ayaka instantly turned her gaze away.

Her gaze flew over to the target, a black gas mask. It was obvious who Ayaka considered the best partner (tentative). Kyousuke felt cold sweat dripping off his back.

"I'm gonna get killed if I reciprocate her love, you know?"

"Don't worry. She promised to endure!"

"...That's really uncertain."

The conversation continued much further. Even if Renko was Ayaka's savior, how can I submit that easily--Kyousuke raised his spirits.

As soon as he thought of Renko, his high-speed heart rate seemed to blow his consciousness away...

Supplementary Examination - Secret Track

Inside a room that was dyed red, a scream was heard that was difficult to imagine coming from a human's voice.

With the flash of a white arm, the sound quieted down.

"--It's me."

A sweet lolita voice. At the desk that was illuminated red by the setting sun, Kurumiya stopped in her task of setting exam questions, holding her cellphone to her ear.

The cat cellphone strap had rolled over eyes and swayed lightly like a hanged corpse.

"....."

Silence. After waiting for a while, there was still no response.

Kurumiya's brow became knitted as she drummed her fingers on the desk.

"Hey, I said it's me. Are you listening?"

'Yes. I'm listening, Hijirin."

Just as she asked in fury, a soprano voice responded.

"Answer if you're listening, you piece of shit."

'Sorry sorry. Hijirin's voice is so cute, I can't help but get entranced by the sound of it.'

"...Shut up. I have no time to talk rubbish with you."

'Oh my? You're getting shy?'

"Cut this crap. Do you want me to slaughter you?"

'Even you can't kill me over the phone, right? Fufu.'

"You will die in a ditch."

Kurumiya clicked her tongue and leaned back against her chair.

'...By the way, it really has been quite a while, Hijirin. How are you lately?'

"Yes, killing very happily. You?"

'Hmm~ Not too good. The targets are very resilient.'

"I guess so. Sounds very unusual. After all, they gave birth to that guy, so it's not surprising."

'...Oh, that one.'

"Yes. The one I mentioned last time. The boy that Renko fell for."

'------'

The mood changed on the other side of the line.

The voice lowered in pitch subtly.

'...Oh, that boy. I remember his name being Kamiya Kyousuke-kun, isn't it? Is she still that obsessed about him?'

"Yes. Rather, the situation is getting worse. It's like she's totally fallen for him."

--Crack. The sound of something tearing open.

'H-Hmm... Is that so? They still haven't started going out? If their feelings are mutual, the stalled feelings of murderous intent will begin to flow again and she'll kill him, right?'

"Supposedly. But after all, that's only according to her."

'But, but! Have they held hands? Intimate skin contact? Even a kiss... No? No way!? If that's the case, what can we do!?'

"God knows. Don't ask me. However--"

Without waiting for the other side to calm down, she told her:

"Renko disobeyed my orders."

'...Heh. What, you asked her to kill Kyousuke-kun again?'

"No. This time it's the little sister. I ordered her to beat up the little sister half dead in front of her older brother."

Just as she gave the shotgun to Ayaka and was teaching her how to use it at the shooting range--

Kurumiya had issued orders to Renko.

Pummel Ayaka in front of Kyousuke. Make him feel the urge to kill. Make him feel killing intent for real. While loosening the restrictions against murder, it would offer a glimpse at the little sister's value...

If Ayaka killed successfully, it should shake Kyousuke quite a bit. If Eiri and Maina got killed, then they were ultimately limited in talent. That was all.

Furthermore, if Renko touched his most beloved Ayaka, Kyousuke was not going to forgive Renko.

Renko's love would be over and the error would be eliminated.

--That was supposed to be the plan.

"But *it* disobeyed my command. I unlocked the limiter beforehand, and it did come off in fact... But *it* suppressed *its* killing intent, allowing the little sister to be saved from the verge of danger. Despite no reason, most likely... *It* hates getting hated by Kyousuke more than being punished by me. Is this something to

treat lightly? The Murder Made created for the sake of killing can actually stop itself from murdering. Completely unprecedented."

'...Right.'

"Letting *it* enroll is turning out to be a mistake. Treating a tool as human... Your idea was totally incomprehensible--"

'Hijirin.'

Neither hot nor cold, a calm voice.

'You make a fair point, it's very correct. But I knew this sort of thing from the start already. If you knew, how could I possibly not?'

"......Muu."

The tone of voice sounded very proud.

But not condescending at all.

Her mind was brilliant and beyond the likes of Kurumiya.

However, what displeased her was definitely unrelated to her pride.

"...Sorry. I didn't word myself properly."

'Yes. Some things, even if I know them, I'd rather not know them. That girl is indeed not a human but a tool belonging to us, the Organization. It is quite strange for a tool's creator to send her to attend non-essential school and be treated like a human. Even I feel so myself, you know? However, I--'

The other side fell silent.

Then Kurumiya's mood became worse.

"Sigh... Well, how should I put this? I am trying to stand on your side as much as I possibly can, you know? But if the anomaly reaches the level of affecting

mission quality, the higher-ups are not going to refrain from intervention. No matter what your wishes are as the creator, at this rate, Renko will--"

'Eh? Sorry, I went to grab a Monster Energy just now.'

"Die in a ditch."

'I said sorry already. If you make the mood so serious, my old habit of breaking stuff will act up subconsciously.'

"Really, then get yourself to the hospital."

'Ahaha. No way. I'm very busy.'

"...Hmph. Are you playing hide and seek with the targets? Don't break the bones."

'Hmm. Right now, I'm the one who's hiding. The targets seem to have connections to the underside of society... It's taking more effort than imagined. Oh well, since I'm traveling as the legal guardian, this basically feels like a trip. I'll bring souvenirs back to you this time, Hijirin.'

"Why thank you. Then mail me another."

The doll hanging on Kurumiya's cellphone was also a gift from her friend.

This mascot belonged to a death metal band called "The Black Cat Murder" and she had also set her ringtone to one of their songs. Kurumiya loved them very much.

Because their tastes were very aligned, she looked forward to her gifts.

'No.'

"....."

For some reason, she refused outright.

Perhaps because Kurumiya's feelings of anger were transmitted, she became slightly anxious.

'No, that's not what I mean! I'm not mailing it, I'm going to hand it over to you directly.'

"...Directly."

'Yes. I've been curious for a while now. After hearing what you said, I'm a bit worried. I'm heading over to your place, Hijirin. I'm ignoring the targets for now. I have to check out Renko's condition. You'd like me to return too, right?'

"......Muu."

Just as her friend said, Renko's anomaly was very serious and not something that Kurumiya could control.

If she could make a trip back as the creator, Kurumiya would feel most grateful.

"Yes. That'll be a great help."

'Hmm. I'll handle the higher-ups so just relax and drink your milk. When I return, it'd be nice if there were a little more maturation.'

"...You bitch. Once you're here, I'm going to bury you in the soil."

'Ehhhh!? I was talking about Renko... Fufu. It's been six months, I'm so looking forward to it! Meeting you and Renko goes without saying. Then there's that--Kamiya Kyousuke-kun. I have to see my daughter's first crush. I have so many questions to ask him. Why did he reject Renko? Etc. How's his progress with Renko? Etc. What does he think of Renko? Etc. Depending on his answer, I might forgive him.'

Despite the smile in the friend's voice, she was not calm inside.

Kurumiya made a wry look. To think she would call a tool her "daughter"...

This person's obsession with Renko had already reached the realm of an idiot mother's.

'So, that's all I have to say... Thanks! I'll be in touch.'

"Yeah. You're kind of frail, so take care of yourself."

'Hijirin, you're the one who tries too hard. Take care too. Goodbye.'

"Yeah, see you."

Answering, Kurumiya hung up.

Exhaling, she took the cellphone from her ear. The urge to laugh naturally intensified.

The sun had already set. Darkness occupied the room except for the light from the cellphone on the desk.

Remaining on the screen in the call records was the name of the friend just now.

Hikawa Reiko...

千尋ちゃんぺろぺろ
4巻も楽しみです。

Afterword - Master of Ceremonies

Nice to meet you or hello again, I am Mizushiro Mizuki.

After *Murderers* and *Murderer Princess*, Volume 3 is *Murderer's Hope*. This is the story centered on Kyousuke's little sister who was active in the background during Volumes 1 and 2. Despite the reproachable developments, this is a love comedy. In order to enjoy the fun, I didn't make things too exciting, trying to reach a balance between psychopathy and love comedy while moving the plot forward.

And right now, PSYCOME's promotional video has been released! The background music is original, but I think it only feels like ordinary death metal. The chorus part is too short. Is this really a love comedy... This music and stylish imagery, please check it out if it's to your liking.

Editor in charge Gibu-sama, illustrator Namanie-sama, Musicago Graphics for doing the design, proofreaders, everyone involved with advertising, friends, family, relatives, as well as everyone from various industries involved with helping this book's publishing, readers who like and support PSYCOME, and last but not least...

You, who are reading this book in your hand. Truly, thank you!

The next volume is *Murderer's Taboo*, scheduled to be out for winter--A story centered on Eiri.

Mizushiro Mizuki ~listening to Architects while writing~